

The CreepyPasta Collection



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This book is dedicated
to all who love a good scare.

A Note From the Editor

I have always liked the horror genre. It never ceases to amaze me how the written word can force a person to sleep with the lights on. This feeling has followed us since childhood, and still remains inside us. The Horror genre has thrived in culture for hundreds of years, and still manages to pass the test of time.

I encourage you, to read this book alone, on a rainy night. Get a blanket to keep warm during the cold. Turn all of the lights off, and then you will be prepared. Keep one thing in mind: It is only a book... It's only a book...

-Chris W.

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Tulpa

Last year I spent six months participating in what I was told was a psychological experiment. I found an ad in my local paper looking for imaginative people looking to make good money, and since it was the only ad that week that I was remotely qualified for, I gave them a call and we arranged an interview.

They told me that all I would have to do is stay in a room, alone, with sensors attached to my head to read my brain activity, and while I was there I would visualize a double of myself. They called it my "tulpa".

It seemed easy enough, and I agreed to do it as soon as they told me how much I would be paid. And the next day, I began. They brought me to a simple room and gave me a bed, then attached sensors to my head and hooked them into a little black box on the table beside me. They talked me through the process of visualizing

my double again, and explained that if I got bored or restless, instead of moving around, I should visualize my double moving around, or try to interact with him, and so on. The idea was to keep him with me the entire time I was in the room.

I had trouble with it for the first few days. It was more controlled than any sort of daydreaming I'd done before. I'd imagine my double for a few minutes, and then grow distracted. But by the fourth day, I could manage to keep him "present" for the entire six hours. They told me I was doing very well.

The second week, they gave me a different room, with wall-mounted speakers. They told me they wanted to see if I could still keep the tulpa with me in spite of distracting stimuli. The music was discordant, ugly and unsettling, and it made the process a little more difficult, but I managed nonetheless. The next week they

played even more unsettling music, punctuated with shrieks, feedback loops, what sounded like an old school modem dialing up, and guttural voices speaking some foreign language. I just laughed it off - I was a pro by then.

After about a month, I started to get bored. To liven things up, I started interacting with my doppelganger. We'd have conversations, or play rock-paper-scissors, or I'd imagine him juggling, or break-dancing, or whatever caught my fancy. I asked the researchers if my foolishness would adversely affect their study, but they encouraged me.

So we played, and communicated, and that was fun for a while. And then it got a little strange. I was telling him about my first date one day, and he corrected me. I'd said my date was wearing a yellow top, and he told me it was a green one. I thought about it for a second, and realized he was right. It creeped me out, and after my shift

that day, I talked to the researchers about it. "You're using the thought-form to access your subconscious," they explained. "You knew on some level that you were wrong, and you subconsciously corrected yourself."

What had been creepy was suddenly cool. I was talking to my subconscious! It took some practice, but I found that I could question my tulpa and access all sorts of memories. I could make it quote whole pages of books I'd read once, years before, or things I was taught and immediately forgot in high school. It was awesome.

That was around the time I started "calling up" my double outside of the research center. Not often at first, but I was so used to imagining him by now that it almost seemed odd to not see him. So whenever I was bored, I'd visualize my double. Eventually I started doing it almost all the time. It was amusing to take him along like an invisible friend. I

imagined him when I was hanging out with friends, or visiting my mom; I even brought him along on a date once. I didn't need to speak aloud to him, so I was able to carry out conversations with him and no one was the wiser.

I know that sounds strange, but it was fun. Not only was he a walking repository of everything I knew and everything I had forgotten, he also seemed more in touch with me than I did at times. He had an uncanny grasp of the minutiae of body language that I didn't even realize I was picking up on. For example, I'd thought the date I brought him along on was going badly, but he pointed out how she was laughing a little too hard at my jokes, and leaning towards me as I spoke, and a bunch of other subtle clues I wasn't consciously picking up on. I listened, and let's just say that that date went very well.

By the time I'd been at the research center for four months, he

was with me constantly. The researchers approached me one day after my shift, and asked me if I'd stopped visualizing him. I denied it, and they seemed pleased. I silently asked my double if he knew what prompted that, but he just shrugged it off. So did I.

I withdrew a little from the world at that point. I was having trouble relating to people. It seemed to me that they were so confused and unsure of themselves, while I had a manifestation of myself to confer with. It made socializing awkward. Nobody else seemed aware of the reasons behind their actions, why some things made them mad and others made them laugh. They didn't know what moved them. But I did - or at least, I could ask myself and get an answer.

A friend confronted me one evening. He pounded at the door until I answered it, and came in fuming and swearing up a storm. "You haven't answered when I called you in fucking weeks, you dick!" He

yelled. "What's your fucking problem?"

I was about to apologize to him, and probably would have offered to hit the bars with him that night, but my tulpa grew suddenly furious. "Hit him," it said, and before I knew what I was doing, I had. I heard his nose break. He fell to the floor and came up swinging, and we beat each other up and down my apartment.

I was more furious then than I have ever been, and I was not merciful. I knocked him to the ground and gave him two savage kicks to the ribs, and that was when he fled, hunched over and sobbing.

The police were by a few minutes later, but I told them that he had been the instigator, and since he wasn't around to refute me, they let me off with a warning. My tulpa was grinning the entire time. We spent the night crowing about my victory and sneering over how badly I'd beaten my friend.

It wasn't until the next morning, when I was checking out my black eye and cut lip in the mirror, that I remembered what had set me off. My double was the one who'd grown furious, not me. I'd been feeling guilty and a little ashamed, but he'd goaded me into a vicious fight with a concerned friend. He was present, of course, and knew my thoughts. "You don't need him anymore. You don't need anyone else," he told me, and I felt my skin crawl.

I explained all this to the researchers who employed me, but they just laughed it off. "You can't be scared of something that you're imagining," one told me. My double stood beside him, and nodded his head, then smirked at me.

I tried to take their words to heart, but over the next few days I found myself growing more and more anxious around my tulpa, and it seemed that he was changing. He looked taller, and more menacing. His eyes twinkled with mischief,

and I saw malice in his constant smile. No job was worth losing my mind over, I decided. If he were out of control, I'd put him down. I was so used to him at that point that visualizing him was an automatic process, so I started trying my damndest to not visualize him. It took a few days, but it started to work somewhat. I could get rid of him for hours at a time. But every time he came back, he seemed worse. His skin seemed ashen, his teeth more pointed. He hissed and gibbered and threatened and swore. The discordant music I'd been listening to for months seemed to accompany him everywhere. Even when I was at home - I'd relax and slip up, no longer concentrating on not seeing him, and there he'd be, and that howling noise with him.

I was still visiting the research center and spending my six hours there. I needed the money, and I thought they weren't aware that I was now actively not visualizing my tulpa. I was wrong. After my shift one day, about five

and a half months in, two impressively men grabbed and restrained me, and someone in a lab coat jabbed a hypodermic needle into me.

I woke up from my stupor back in the room, strapped into the bed, music blaring, with my doppelganger standing over me cackling. He hardly looked human anymore. His features were twisted. His eyes were sunken in their sockets and filmed over like a corpse's. He was much taller than me, but hunched over. His hands were twisted, and the fingernails were like talons. He was, in short, fucking terrifying. I tried to will him away, but I just couldn't seem to concentrate. He giggled, and tapped the IV in my arm. I thrashed in my restraints as best I could, but could hardly move at all.

"They're pumping you full of the good shit, I think. How's the mind? All fuzzy?" He leaned closer and closer as he spoke. I gagged; his breath smelt like spoiled meat. I

tried to focus, but couldn't banish him.

The next few weeks were terrible. Every so often, someone in a doctor's coat would come in and inject me with something, or force-feed me a pill. They kept me dizzy and unfocused, and sometimes left me hallucinating or delusional. My thoughtform was still present, constantly mocking. He interacted with, or perhaps caused, my delusions. I hallucinated that my mother was there, scolding me, and then he cut her throat and her blood showered me. It was so real that I could taste it.

The doctors never spoke to me. I begged at times, screamed, hurled invectives, demanded answers. They never spoke to me. They may have talked to my tulpa, my personal monster. I'm not sure. I was so doped and confused that it may have just been more delusion, but I remember them talking with him. I grew convinced that he was the real

one, and I was the thoughtform. He encouraged that line of thought at times, mocked me at others.

Another thing that I pray was a delusion: he could touch me. More than that, he could hurt me. He'd poke and prod at me if he felt I wasn't paying enough attention to him. Once he grabbed my testicles and squeezed until I told him I loved him. Another time, he slashed my forearm with one of his talons. I still have a scar - most days I can convince myself that I injured myself, and just hallucinated that he was responsible. Most days.

Then one day, while he was telling me a story about how he was going to gut everyone I loved, starting with my sister, he paused. A querulous look crossed his face, and reached out and touched my head. Like my mother used to when I was feverish. He stayed still for a long moment, and then smiled. "All thoughts are creative," he told me. Then he walked out the door.

Three hours later, I was given an injection, and passed out. I awoke unrestrained. Shaking, I made my way to the door and found it unlocked. I walked out into the empty hallway, and then ran. I stumbled more than once, but I made it down the stairs and out into the lot behind the building. There, I collapsed, weeping like a child. I knew I had to keep moving, but I couldn't manage it.

I got home eventually - I don't remember how. I locked the door, and shoved a dresser against it, took a long shower, and slept for a day and a half. Nobody came for me in the night, and nobody came the next day, or the one after that. It was over. I'd spent a week locked in that room, but it had felt like a century. I'd withdrawn so much from my life beforehand that nobody had even known I was missing.

The police didn't find anything. The research center was empty when they searched it. The paper trail fell apart. The names I'd given

them were aliases. Even the money I'd received was apparently untraceable.

I recovered as much as one can. I don't leave the house much, and I have panic attacks when I do. I cry a lot. I don't sleep much, and my nightmares are terrible. It's over, I tell myself. I survived. I use the concentration those bastards taught me to convince myself. It works, sometimes.

Not today, though. Three days ago, I got a phone call from my mother. There's been a tragedy. My sister's the latest victim in a spree of killings, the police say. The perpetrator mugs his victims, and then guts them.

The funeral was this afternoon. It was as lovely a service as a funeral can be, I suppose. I was a little distracted, though. All I could hear was music coming from somewhere distant. Discordant, unsettling stuff, that sounds like feedback, and shrieking, and a

modem dialing up. I hear it still -
a little louder now.

Self Preservation

If you're reading this, then I
am hopefully long gone. It's been...
two months now since the meteor
struck Mississippi. There was a lot
of public interest in it,
astrologers and the like all
gathering around for a look. They
took samples of the rock and
shipped them all over the world to
museums in every country. Hell, I
almost made a trip to have a look
myself, but I had an interview with
a potential employer. If he hadn't
called me up the previous day, I'd
be dead now. Three days later,
after the initial hype died down,
the news reported nothing on the
meteor for a couple of days.

The next thing I heard about it
was when I got home from the pub
and turned on the late-night news.
I was just in time to catch a
breaking news article. The worried-
looking reporter informed me that

almost everyone who had been in the
vicinity of Mississippi when the
meteor went down had been
hospitalized. Their symptoms were
similar to those that a corpse
experiences during decomposition.
Ten people had already died, mostly
the elderly and the very young.
Scientists and geneticists from all
over the globe were working
frantically to try and find a cure.
Being smarter than the average
bear, I gathered some supplies and
prepared for an epidemic. Years of
being paranoid beyond reason were
finally about to pay off.

The news the next day had a
lighter tone. A Chinese scientist
had worked out that the meteor had
contained an alien strain of
bacteria that slowly broke down
flesh tissue. The scientist also
remarked that the bacteria were
only affecting humans. He had also
worked out that if a victim
consumed a living being, such as an
insect, it would delay the
progression of the bacteria, giving
the scientists more time to figure

out a permanent cure. Anyone who thought they might have contracted the infection was to eat as many live creatures as they could. The reporter also explained that the US Army was attempting to contain the infection.

They failed.

Anyone who has read Stephen King's book, *The Stand*, will have an idea of how the bacteria made its way around the world. It passed through the air, but to catch it, you had to be near someone infected. Because the symptoms took between three to five days to kick in, people didn't realize that they were infected. In a week, Victor's Disease, as it had been named, was global.

I had barricaded myself in my house, with towels and blankets stuffed into every crack. I had the TV tuned to the news all day and night. The scientists had not predicted that the bacteria would adapt to the infected people's efforts at trying to keep it at

bay. Victims all over the world were claiming that the insects were no longer working. People were starting to catch small mammals and eat them.

As the days went by, people were slowly eating larger and larger animals. The first reported case of cannibalism was, ironically, the last broadcast made. The anchorman's hair was falling out and he was missing three teeth. He nervously told America that there had been a reported case of cannibalism in Southern Europe. He also said that there would be no further broadcasts. All survivors were to lock themselves in their house and not let anyone in.

For the next week and a half, I watched the infected shamle up the street, knocking on doors. One of my neighbors, a couple of houses down from me, was stupid enough to open the door. Three people dragged him out and started biting his flesh. They started with his arms and legs, trying to keep him alive

for as long as possible. They were crying as they ate. Their meal was shrieking in pain, and the three people eating him were apologizing furiously through mouthfuls of his arm. I don't think they were unable to control themselves; it looked more like they were disgusted by what they had to do to stay alive.

They tried to break into my house five or six days later, but my barricades held. They were outside, begging me to let them in. "Just one bite. Please, be generous." I listened to their pleading all night, too scared to sleep.

I suppose I should explain why I'm writing this. I'm infected. Yesterday I coughed and lost a canine. I spent the night pulling out my teeth, easing them out one by one. It didn't hurt; they just slid out, like pulling up carrots. Anyway, as I was saying, I'm infected. The bugs have stopped working, and all the wild animals have long since run away. I have

decided to lure someone into my house and attack them. It sounds so wrong writing that out, but I don't want to die. And I'm so hungry.

I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry.

Teddy

My sister had a teddy bear, a scary teddy bear. I do not know why, but it creeped me out. It was just so disturbing to me. The thing had eyes that looked so real. It was as if it was made from a real bear and its face was just blank and unsettling.

I first started to get weird feelings about the bear when my sister first got it, she was only a baby at the time, and I was about 4. We had a dog, you see, and he had a habit of eating things so my mother always had to put it up on the small cabinet in the corner of the hallway upstairs. Every time I went up those stairs, I saw that creepy bear suddenly glare around the corner at me, as if it was watching me. This wasn't the weird

part; it started to get really weird about 5 years later: at the age of 6-7 my sister had lost interest in the bear so my mother just threw it in the old toy cupboard, the only problem was that the cupboard was in my room.

When I was 9, old enough to stay on my own and go to bed without any assistance, every night I would get into my bed at night and turn my lamp off. This is when it got scary. As I was getting some sleep, I suddenly remembered Mum putting that teddy in the cupboard; I slowly turned to look over across my room to see it through the glass. My heart suddenly stopped as I thought about the horrors the plush had caused me, but at the age of 9, I wanted to grow up and lose my fears so I just shook it off and put my head on the pillow.

When I got up to pull my sheets on a bit further, I noticed something that would scar me for life: there sat, at the end of my bedroom, the teddy. My heart

started beating normally again. I sat there staring at it for about a minute. When I needed to yawn, I closed my eyes. I opened them to see the teddy sitting closer to my bed. At this point, I was really freaked out. I started to move back to the wall and looked around to see if there was any sign that anyone had come in. When I looked back to see the teddy on the end of my bed, I was so startled that I almost fainted from fear. When I blinked, it had gone. I looked around. To my relief, I saw no sign of it.

I sat my head back down on my pillow hoping for some sleep. Then I opened my eyes. It was above my head, staring straight down. I screamed as it lunged down at me. I will never see a bear the same way again. A few years later, after years of horror, I burned it; I sat in enjoyment as the bear was turned to smoking ashes in my fireplace.

I have lived my teenage life through adolescence; the only thing

I could remember that was in any way similar to my bad experience was when I watched Trainspotting. That fucking baby scene shocked me so badly but other than that, all was well.

When I turned 19, I was about to move into my new home. I had been given the keys to the house and was ready to set up my furniture. After hours of carrying, I carried the final box from the removal truck into the front door and shut it behind me. I turned to go into the kitchen and put it on the table. I opened it to see a cabinet. I took it out, walked into my new living room and placed it in the corner, stared at it and thought to myself, I don't remember packing this cabinet. I didn't really care that much as I had just moved into my new home.

I walked back into the kitchen to grab my television and brought it into the living room when I saw it. The teddy, it just sat there, staring at me with those realistic

blank eyes. It was beyond imagination, like something from a horror movie. My fears could not be contained and whatever that bear or demon possessing it was, it knew I was scared. I threw it in the garbage and put a cinder block over the lid as I slept in my bed that night, content and feeling a little more secure. I woke up that night and checked the time. 12:00.

I heard a sound in the kitchen. I walked there, and noticed that the outside door was wide open. Muddy paw tracks lead into the kitchen. I saw that one of my knives was gone from the holder and then I heard something creeping behind me. I hightailed to my car and drove. I looked in the rear view mirror and saw its face. It was holding a knife. I slammed the brakes. It flew through the front windshield, stood up, and stared right into my eyes. I felt as if it was pulling me towards it. The only thing that would be coming towards it would be my *two front wheels*. I rammed into, it felt a slight bump,

sighed in relief, and drove. Not even a minute after, I felt as if something was cutting at the bottom of my car, then my car grinded to a halt. I went out to check it: there was a slash through my fuel tank. I ran for dear life to the nearest hotel to stay at. The only one was a mile away. I ran with every few feet it was just one foot behind. Once I got to the hotel, I fell on the bed with exhaustion. When I woke up...

It was at the end of the bed...

The art of Jacob Emory

Ghost stories? Nah, we don't have anything like that around here. We DO have the story of Jacob, but that's about as close as you'll get.

...You really want to know? Well, I'm not supposed to tell you, but all right, just no interrupting. I don't have the patience for it.

How to describe Jacob Emory... well, I guess you could say he was

the kind of guy you could never take notice of. This isn't to say he was a bad kid, in any sense- many people in this town thought he was the most reliable person for an odd job in the state- but he never really excelled in anything. He was the living proof behind the statement, "jack of all trades, and ace of none." Most of this was due to his lack of will. He dabbled in damn near everything this town could offer him, automobiles, radio operation, store management, what have you, but he never stuck with anything. His friends and workers went after him about it a number of times, but everybody got the same unsatisfying response: "It just wasn't enough." Needless to say, any friends he kept were either very patient or never spoke of the matter altogether.

It was probably inevitable, and then, that Jacob would leave to go abroad. I don't remember where he went, but I think Gertrude down the street knew before she passed on- you'll have to scout someone else

if you ever get curious. In any case, no one even tried to stop him. Everybody thought that a little travel would stamp the ambition out of him, or else feed it until it was no longer an issue. Hell, we even gave him a sending-off party, which I thought was pretty nice of everybody.

So anyway, he was gone for... six, seven years? Can't remember. You'll have to check with someone else about that, too. Anyways, he came back, eventually, and he had changed, obviously enough. He was amiable, energetic; all smiles all the time, and we all quickly learned why. He showed us a souvenir he'd brought back- a solid black stick, the length of a pencil but the texture of chalk. We all wondered why on earth such a simple thing would prompt such a spring in his step, until he gave his demonstration. He took a piece of paper, and with this stick- God, there's got to be a better word for it- with this stick, he... he drew a crude circle.

It dropped, and rested on the border of the paper, like a stone. It didn't leave the paper, but it acted out on it, sort of like an old movie projector on a screen.

Son, I know how crazy that sounds, and if you feel like playing skeptic, then you can leave an old man to his craziness, but I know what I saw, even if everyone's been hushing it up, and that stone he drew dropped. Jake even passed around the paper, and as it was being passed, it rolled around as the paper got tilted. None of us had any words for it- Hell, what was there to say? - But he continued drawing demonstration after demonstration for us, stick figures in various pageants and plays doing everything from fighting each other to making perfect "human" pyramids, and we all thought it was incredible. That was all the go-ahead he needed- he announced that he planned to put on shows to pay for rent and food, where he would draw anything the crowd members wanted. THAT we

talked to some length about, and he eventually convinced us that it would be safe, his drawings ethical, the practice lucrative and unique, and the attention would not go anywhere outside of the town's borders.

Poor Jacob. If I'd not been so swept up in the moment, I might've read the signs right then and there, and saved the sorry son of a bitch by snapping the terrible thing in half. But I was younger, we all were, and we saw no problem with encouraging him with what we all saw as an incredible experience to be shared with everyone else. Now, he didn't have any big radio or television connections, mind you, and the Internet wouldn't come around for another decade, so he did what all people on a shoestring budget do- he advertised his show with fliers. Fliers might not mean anything to you city-folk, but in a small town, they gain a fair glance-over from time to time, and what's more, Jacob's managed to stick out by having little figures

jump up and down and whatnot to get people's attention. His first show must've gotten nearly sixty or so people, probably a lot more than that.

And his shows were fantastic. Someone would shout out a scene from a play or a comedy sketch, and Jake's hand would fly over a white wall like a bird. He'd been holding back when he made that stone, that's for damn sure. His illustrations were all spot-on, and he could make an incredible human figure in minutes. Come to think of it, I don't remember any of his scenes lasting more than ten minutes to make. They were all really well-done scenes, too- not only could you see a knight charge a castle, Jake would draw the castle's interior as well, like a wedding cake split down the middle, so you could see the knight scale the walls, fight his way through levels to the dungeon, fight back out with the princess, and make a leaping jump off castle parapets onto his getaway horse all in

complete silence. Not realistic, no, but that was part of the appeal- none of us went in there expecting something real. When a scene or a sketch was finished, either the characters would leave off a wall or he'd cover the wall with white paint. This was good, in a way- it gave these shows a time limit, so that when he'd finished with all of the four walls in the room, everyone knew the show was over until the paint dried.

Jake, meanwhile, was changing in a bad way. I'd mentioned that upon his return, he'd been extremely energetic. Well, that energy, that vitality or fervor or whatever you want to call it, it never left him. Not for an instant. Far from it, it seemed to grow in him, and he enjoyed it all too much. His eyes grew wider, he slept gradually less over time, his statements and opinions more radical and frenzied, and though he never was a pushover, he was starting to make people nervous in his company.

A month or two passed, and Jake's audience grew like a wildfire. Nearly everyone in the town paid to see Jake's art in action, and he had to rent out larger and larger places for them to sit. He now didn't stop after one scene was done- he moved directly on to the next, put on the next blank space on the wall, sometimes to the intriguing effect of causing scenes to mingle, which the crowd loved. The subject matter got more wild and immoral, the monsters got more bizarre and creative, the fighters using more impossible weaponry, all for the sake of the crowd's interests. Jake got steadily more indulgent, which we figured was from the money, and he became a drinker and a womanizer (neither of which got rid of that vitality, by the way.) Some of those women claimed that they'd woken up in the middle of the night to see him scribbling with that stick on a drawing pad, a gigantic grin on his face, and while most of them said that they'd assumed he

was drawing them in the nude, there's rumors that one or two of them got glances at that notepad. Those anonymous few supposedly said that those drawings absolutely weren't nude pictures, but neither of them, whoever they are, will say what he was drawing. Don't bother looking for the notepads or fliers, though; they're all gone now. I'm getting off-track; point is, he was hitting the bottle, and that's important, because it was that drinking that would eventually ruin everything.

On the night of one of his performances, as he walked in front of his cheering crowd, it was immediately apparent to everybody that he was completely drunk. I was in the front row, and I could smell the bourbon on him from ten feet away. The show started, he went through a bunch of sketches and scenarios the crowd recommended, when at the end someone asked that he draw himself. Everyone cheered the idea, I guessed they'd been wondering what his creations

thought of him, and he eventually obliged.

No sooner had Jake finished connecting the final two lines on his coat, than every single character, across the vast, expansive wall, all stopped and looked directly at that illustration. Lovers stopped kissing, clowns stopped laughing, robots stopped fighting pirates, everything stopped and looked at the Jacob-illustration. The crowd died almost instantly- I remember Jake's face at that moment, pale white, full of terrible comprehension at his mistake, and looking desperately for the cans of white paint he'd forgotten to put out before the show. Everyone else? They were looking at the fake Jacob.

That Jacob reached into his jacket pocket, pulled out a black stick of his own, and as we all watched, drew a door. He pushed on his side and the door swung open,

allowing him to walk through onto the floor of the auditorium.

The rest was an absolute hellish pandemonium. People screamed and ran for the exits as Jacob's characters, both those currently on the wall and those which had previously left before being covered up, ran out of their own exit, throwing pies, shooting lasers, blowing fire and poison and the impossible. I was near enough the exit to escape, and gave only one backwards glance. The scene will haunt me forever.

Jacob Emory was being dragged by his creations, kicking and screaming, through the door his copy had made.

The auditorium burned down, obviously enough, but I have no idea how many characters escaped, what happened to the fake Emory, or how many people died. The fire brought the fire department from the nearest cities up to over a hundred miles away- they in turn brought the police force, which

brought the government, which hushed up everything. They took the fliers and any art Jake had made, and swore everyone to secrecy or else life detainment. The fire was blamed on a cigarette in the garbage during a basketball game, and we all eventually went on with our lives. Jacob was made to never have existed.

In retrospect, I realize everything. Jacob hadn't been creating illustrations. Illustrations don't move, much less act or attack-they're just images people see, shadows made to look like real things. Jacob had been making life- actual thinking things in some alternate dimension, using a power that was never meant to fall to mortal hands. He got drunk on his power. His punishment was probably well deserved.

Incidentally, the government screwed up on two different accounts. They did a damn good job silencing everyone, but proof remains. The ruins are still there,

you know, the auditorium's ruins. I hear they're going to start reconstruction soon, which will wipe out any remaining evidence someone can definitely see, but I went back there once, several years after the fire- just once. Amidst the rubble, covered in ash, I saw something squirming. I looked closer. It was Jacob Emory's hand on the wall. Exactly like it had been three years ago, (sweaty but calloused, I remember,) but it was constantly flailing, as if the body it was supposed to be attached to, was still writhing in flames.

That was mistake number one. Number two was those creations.

Like I said, I don't know how many escaped, nor how many the government agents found and caught, but I will say only this- Those tall grass meadows on the outskirts of town? Don't go into them. Ever. You were asking about those white figures you've seen at night, right?

This town doesn't have ghost stories.

Mr. Widemouth

During my childhood my family was like a drop of water in a vast river, never remaining in one location for long. We settled in Rhode Island when I was eight, and there we remained until I went to college in Colorado Springs. Most of my memories are rooted in Rhode Island, but there are fragments in the attic of my brain, which belong to the various homes we had lived in when I was much younger.

Most of these memories are unclear and pointless – chasing after another boy in the back yard of a house in North Carolina, trying to build a raft to float on the creek behind the apartment we rented in Pennsylvania, and so on. But there is one set of memories, which remains as clear as glass, as though they were just made yesterday. I often wonder whether these memories are simply lucid

dreams produced by the long sickness I experienced that spring, but in my heart, I know they are real.

We were living in a house just outside the bustling metropolis of New Vineyard, Maine, and population 643. It was a large structure, especially for a family of three. There were a number of rooms that I didn't see in the five months we resided there. In some ways it was a waste of space, but it was the only house on the market at the time, at least within an hour's commute to my father's place of work.

The day after my fifth birthday (attended by my parents alone), I came down with a fever. The doctor said I had mononucleosis, which meant no rough play and more fever for at least another three weeks. It was horrible timing to be bed-ridden— we were in the process of packing our things to move to Pennsylvania, and most of my things were already packed away in boxes,

leaving my room barren. My mother brought me ginger ale and books several times a day, and these served the function of being my primary form of entertainment for the next few weeks. Boredom always loomed just around the corner, waiting to rear its ugly head and compound my misery.

I don't exactly recall how I met Mr. Widemouth. I think it was about a week after I was diagnosed with mono. My first memory of the small creature was asking him if he had a name. He told me to call him Mr. Widemouth, because his mouth was large. In fact, everything about him was large in comparison to his body— his head, his eyes, and his crooked ears— but his mouth was by far the largest.

"You look kind of like a Furby," I said as he flipped through one of my books.

Mr. Widemouth stopped and gave me a puzzled look. "Furby? What's a Furby?" he asked.

I shrugged. "You know... the toy; the little robot with the big ears. You can pet and feed them, almost like a real pet."

"Oh." Mr. Widemouth resumed his activity. "You don't need one of those. They aren't the same as having a real friend."

I remember Mr. Widemouth disappearing every time my mother stopped by to check in on me. "I lay under your bed," he later explained. "I don't want your parents to see me because I'm afraid they won't let us play anymore."

We didn't do much during those first few days. Mr. Widemouth just looked at my books, fascinated by the stories and pictures they contained. The third or fourth morning after I met him, he greeted me with a large smile on his face. "I have a new game we can play," he said. "We have to wait until after your mother comes to check on you, because she can't see us play it. It's a secret game."

After my mother delivered more books and soda at the usual time, Mr. Widemouth slipped out from under the bed and tugged my hand. "We have to go the room at the end of this hallway," he said. I objected at first, as my parents had forbidden me to leave my bed without their permission, but Mr. Widemouth persisted until I gave in.

The room in question had no furniture or wallpaper. Its only distinguishing feature was a window opposite the doorway. Mr. Widemouth darted across the room and gave the window a firm push, flinging it open. He then beckoned me to look out at the ground below.

We were on the second story of the house, but it was on a hill, and from this angle the drop was farther than two stories due to the incline. "I like to play pretend up here," Mr. Widemouth explained. "I pretend that there is a big, soft trampoline below this window, and I jump. If you pretend hard enough

you bounce back up like a feather.
I want you to try."

I was a five-year-old with a fever, so only a hint of skepticism darted through my thoughts as I looked down and considered the possibility. "It's a long drop," I said.

"But that's all a part of the fun. It wouldn't be fun if it were only a short drop. If it were that way you may as well just bounce on a real trampoline."

I toyed with the idea, picturing myself falling through thin air only to bounce back to the window on something unseen by human eyes. But the realist in me prevailed. "Maybe some other time," I said. "I don't know if I have enough imagination. I could get hurt."

Mr. Widemouth's face contorted into a snarl, but only for a moment. Anger gave way to disappointment. "If you say so," he said. He spent the rest of the day under my bed, quiet as a mouse.

The following morning Mr. Widemouth arrived holding a small box. "I want to teach you how to juggle," he said. "Here are some things you can use to practice, before I start giving you lessons."

I looked in the box. It was full of knives. "My parents will kill me!" I shouted, horrified that Mr. Widemouth had brought knives into my room—objects that my parents would never allow me to touch. "I'll be spanked and grounded for a year!"

Mr. Widemouth frowned. "It's fun to juggle with these. I want you to try it."

I pushed the box away. "I can't. I'll get in trouble. Knives aren't safe to just throw in the air."

Mr. Widemouth's frown deepened into a scowl. He took the box of knives and slid under my bed, remaining there the rest of the day. I began to wonder how often he was under me.

I started having trouble sleeping after that. Mr. Widemouth often woke me up at night, saying he put a real trampoline under the window, a big one, one that I couldn't see in the dark. I always declined and tried to go back to sleep, but Mr. Widemouth persisted. Sometimes he stayed by my side until early in the morning, encouraging me to jump.

He wasn't so fun to play with anymore.

My mother came to me one morning and told me I had her permission to walk around outside. She thought the fresh air would be good for me, especially after being confined to my room for so long. Ecstatic, I put on my sneakers and trotted out to the back porch, yearning for the feeling of sun on my face.

Mr. Widemouth was waiting for me. "I have something I want you to see," he said. I must have given him a weird look, because he then said, "It's safe, I promise."

I followed him to the beginning of a deer trail, which ran through the woods behind the house. "This is an important path," he explained. "I've had a lot of friends about your age. When they were ready, I took them down this path, to a special place. You aren't ready yet, but one day, I hope to take you there."

I returned to the house, wondering what kind of place lay beyond that trail.

Two weeks after I met Mr. Widemouth, the last load of our things had been packed into a moving truck. I would be in the cab of that truck, sitting next to my father for the long drive to Pennsylvania. I considered telling Mr. Widemouth that I would be leaving, but even at five years old, I was beginning to suspect that perhaps the creature's intentions were not to my benefit, despite what he said otherwise. For this reason, I decided to keep my departure a secret.

My father and I were in the truck at 4 a.m. He was hoping to make it to Pennsylvania by lunchtime tomorrow with the help of an endless supply of coffee and a six-pack of energy drinks. He seemed more like a man who was about to run a marathon rather than one who was about to spend two days sitting still.

"Early enough for you," my father asked with a hint of sympathy?

I nodded and placed my head against the window, hoping for some sleep before the sun came up. I felt my father's hand on my shoulder. "This is the last move, son, I promise. I know it's hard for you, as sick as you've been. Once daddy gets promoted we can settle down and you can make friends."

I opened my eyes as we backed out of the driveway. I saw Mr. Widemouth's silhouette in my bedroom window. He stood motionless until the truck was about to turn

onto the main road. He gave a pitiful little wave good-bye, steak knife in hand. I didn't wave back.

Years later, I returned to New Vineyard. The piece of land our house stood upon was empty except for the foundation, as the house burned down a few years after my family left. Out of curiosity, I followed the deer trail that Mr. Widemouth had shown me. Part of me expected him to jump out from behind a tree and scare the living bejeesus out of me, but I felt that Mr. Widemouth was gone, somehow tied to the house that no longer existed.

The trail ended at the New Vineyard Memorial Cemetery.

I noticed that many of the tombstones belonged to children.

The Couch

Ok, disclaimer: To the very best of my knowledge, this story is true. I don't expect to convince you - truth be told, I've had a

hard time coming to terms with it myself. Cliché' as it may be, I really am a rational person, and, if not for this, I would probably be the most stone-faced atheist you'd ever meet. But, after much internal struggle and debate, I have come to the conclusion that there are things in life that simply can't be explained with reason, at least in the form in which we know it. Logic, for all the trust we place in it, is really nothing more than a candle, all too easily snuffed out. And when it is gone, we are left alone in the dark, and everything we would scoff at by daylight suddenly becomes very believable.

All right, before I wax too melodramatic, here's my story.

I was very young; only 4 or 5, at most, before either of my siblings were born. It was just Mommy and Daddy and I, living in our little house in Great Bend, Kansas. It was very quaint. We were a young family, without much money,

and most of our furniture was second-hand.

It was the middle of the day. The summer, hot, boring. I was playing marbles by myself on the thin carpet beside the huge, old, flower-patterned-couch. Mom was down the hall in the kitchen, and Dad was at work.

Why I was trying to roll marbles around on the carpet I don't know - we had a perfectly good linoleum floor, after all. But there I was, swishing the marbles back and forth, happily bouncing them into each other. Then, in my overzealous enthusiasm, I rolled too hard. My favorite marble - the clear, ruby-red one, zipped into the dark space under the couch and was lost.

Damnit. Dad wasn't home, and he was the only one strong enough to move that huge old couch for me. I'd have to get my marble back myself.

I reached my hand under the couch, tentatively at first, then

deeper. Encountering no marbles, I pulled my hand out in disappointment.

Then, a hand reached out from under the couch back at me.

I remember the image vividly, and I suspect I always will. It was a slim hand, with tapered fingers - a woman's hand. It was gnarled and wrinkled, as if aged, and it was dead black. Not black as in African, black as in dead. Of course, back then; I didn't know that corpses blacken as they decompose, so I didn't know what the black meant.

The hand reached out to me as far as it could, which was just up to the wrist. Then it retreated under the couch. Then it emerged again, this time pushing with it a little crumpled up, plastic bag with a logo on it I didn't recognize. It waited, as if expecting me to take the bag. Then, when I didn't, it pulled the bag back under the couch and was gone.

I got up, walked down to the kitchen, and told my Mommy what had happened.

Why didn't I run screaming, or at least run? I don't really know. All I can say is, I was a little kid; a hand reaching out from under the couch at me didn't seem like that huge a deal. I hadn't yet learned what was and was not permissible in reality. I had no worldview.

Mom was skeptical, but walked me back to the couch and explained how I was probably imagining things. She even reached her hand under the couch to convince me that nothing was down there. Later, Dad lifted the couch up for me, and the only thing under it was, of course, my missing marble, plus a few more marbles I didn't even remember losing.

But here's the scary part...

For years, I remembered this - I even developed a weird fantasy of little hand-people living under the

couch, and I, in my childlike innocence, believed that they would catch me and take me away if I ever reached into their domain again. Then, as I grew older, I wrote the memory off as a dream I had had as a child - cute, but silly.

Then, a few years ago, I recounted the story to my mother.

She gave me a funny look, and told me she remembered it, because, after all, she had been there. She told me that she remembered me coming to her in the middle of the day and telling her about the hand under the couch, and remembered being highly disturbed by my story, since I was an extremely quiet, well-behaved kid who didn't ever lie.

Then she told me about the couch itself. According to her, she and Dad had gotten the couch from the estate of an old woman who had actually died on it. This was the first time I had heard about this, but it sure explained why they got

rid of the couch within a month of my story.

But here's part that truly frightens me, even to this day. The part that I have to try so hard to get out of my mind some nights still haunts me. Remember that bag the hand pushed towards me? I've never forgotten the logo that was on it. And, recently, (as in a few years ago), I saw the same logo again, on what looked like the same type of bag, in a hardware store.

It was a bag of utility razor blades.

They Come

There's no doubt about it: We fear rain. We wear our trench coats, and our umbrellas, and all that, to avoid getting hit by some lousy droplets of water.

But what is it that makes us fear it? It's not something we learn, it's something deep, which resonates within us.

An inexplicable repulsion
towards getting ourselves wet
during a downpour. It is not a
learnt fear. It's instinctive.

Instinct; its small word for
such a huge idea.

I've lived in the countryside
for 4 months now, and am now back
in the city.

The neighbors used to tell me to
nail the windows shut for about 2
or 3 weeks right after I started
living there, but it was the
beginning of the summer, and with
all the heat of the sun, I wasn't
going to do something as stupid as
that. At least, I thought it was
stupid.

You know that smell, the one
that rises just before the rain
starts falling on you? In the city,
people will always say it's the
smell of watered earth. Of the dirt
getting wet. Of bacteria, and
plants receiving the rain. But the
people have never been in the
country, and they haven't the

faintest idea. You see, the cities,
the huge metropolis has not always
been there. Mankind has been living
in nature far more than it has been
living in the cities. That is why
we still have the instinct to fear
the rain.

It is not the smell of earth,
dirt, bacteria, plants... it's
their smell. They come out in the
rain, and they seek to mate.

But they cannot hold their own,
for they must retreat hastily, as
soon as the rains give in, and the
water stops.

I didn't nail my windows shut,
and as soon as the rain came, I
started hearing it. Have you ever
heard the tiny, almost unnoticeable
hum or high pitch that TVs make
when they are turned on? Have you
ever felt a pressure on your chest
when a low-pitched beat is heard?
Those are the things that filled
the air, with that smell, and those
high and low thumping moans.

It's the smell they follow. I came home a bit wet, for the rain started on my way home. I started hearing those noises, some time after I entered my house. Then the scratching on my door began. I went to check it through the window, and what I saw was horrible. What at first looked like a giant worm was in fact a humanoid thing, with it's lower body being one long leg or tail. Its small, atrophied arms were strong enough to allow them to crawl, slither. And its face, it looked like it had been petrified, the only thing that looked like it was in use was its nose. It moved. And as soon as I got close to the window, it's face shifted towards me. The window was slightly open, and now I know it turned because it could smell me.

It moved towards the window, but it wasn't strong enough to pull itself up inside, and I had enough time to close the window. Soon enough, it turned, trying to sense the smell. My odor. And after a while, more came. From the hills

came an entire legion of those things, 300, 400, maybe.

Thoughts of monkeys running up, towards high rocks, and climbing trees came to my mind. These are the things we've feared since the dawn of time.

After a while, the macabre sight became something I couldn't stand. The noise was so much I couldn't sleep, and the things were so ugly and disgusting, yet I could not stop watching.

Soon, I saw the old stray dog that always wandered around. It was a dirty dog; it must have been 15 years old. He was too old to run, too old to live. They grabbed hold of his paws, one, two, three, five... The dog started howling, and tried to bite one, then the other. Soon, they overpowered the poor animal, and then... It happened. From their chests came out a sting. One, two, three, five, they all started stinging the poor beast. After that, they all turned to see towards the East. Then they

started crawling, as fast as they could, towards the plains. They disappeared as fast as they came.

The dog lay motionless. It seemed like parts of him breathed. At intervals, parts of his body pulsated. Then, suddenly, the dog jumped to his four, and looked renewed. It started running like it was a young pup. Then it went running towards the plains, and disappeared from my sight.

When morning broke, I took nails and wood planks and nailed my windows shut. Not even one hole was left. I even checked for other holes in the walls, the door. God, I was starting to get paranoid.

I left the house to get some groceries from the neighbors. They had their own farm, and had a lot of things for sale, but we're talking farms here. The distance I had to travel was about a mile or two to their house. When I got there, black menacing clouds were near. The neighbors were cold and quick; they gave me eggs, milk,

some honey, and meat, but told me if I wanted to live, I should stay for the night. I remembered the last night, but I still hadn't made the connection of rain and monsters, so I declined the offer and hurried back, while the farmer, behind me, yelled I should stay if I valued my life.

The rain started midway towards my house. I was wet within the first 10 seconds of rain, and it was a real downpour.

I felt the smell of "rain" once more. And then I heard the sounds, once again. The high-pitched noise, the low thumping.

I wet my pants when I saw the first of those things crawling towards me. It's nose, lihigh-pitchedye, moving towards me.

I dropped what I was carrying, and ran for my life. Even though they crawled, they were pretty fast. I was beginning to lose my breath, when suddenly, once again; the image of monkeys climbing trees

came to me. I remembered: it could not lift itself through my window! I realized I had a small hope for surviving this, but I had some hope.

While I was running, I turned to see left and right, all I needed was something above the ground; Something that they couldn't climb up to. The farmer's barn! I could see he left his old wood ladder on the side of it. All I had to do was set it up, climb it, and then raise it so they could not follow. It was heavier than I thought, but I was truly terrified of what would happen if I didn't raise it. When I had put it in place, one of those things, faster than those of its kind, tried to stab me with his sting. I could see it like I was in slow motion. I grabbed the sting with both hands, while the thing kept trying to nail me with it. An egg came out of it, while I tried to keep it away from me. I pushed the thing to the side, and the egg fell to the ground. It started to move and pulsate, but then, it

stopped. The exterior turned to stone.

As soon as that happened, I heard the clamor of those things, stronger and more penetrating than ever. I saw that the one thing, which tried to stab me, was now writhing, like it was in pain. I didn't hesitate for one minute, I felt rage within me, and so I started to kick it. Then I stomped its head in. I ran up the ladder and then I raised it towards me, up on the barn's roof.

I don't know how I managed to, but I fell asleep. The next morning, the farmer's wife waked me, and she was yelling. She kept asking why I was there.

I put the ladder, went down, and found a little stone ball... and the skeleton of a dog, with its skull bashed in.

Why had I never seen those things until now? Why did this happen only in a place like this?

It all came to me. The "egg",
the rain, the smell of wet
people... what about those flashes
in my mind? Those memories are of a
time, long gone?

The people around here, the
environment around here, it's all
very much like the one it was some
thousands of years ago. The only
thing around here that's changed is
the houses. It's the only "new"
thing. And those memories of the
past came to me because this
thing... it's a primal fear. We
have been running from the rain and
water for so long, even when we
were un-evolved chimps, we ran from
it... and ran from the ground as
well.

I left that place as quickly as
I could. I only spent one more
night in those plains. I heard
those screams and thumps. This
time, they came for my house, and
my aroma alone. I had killed one of
their eggs. I knew it was because
of this, how else could one explain
that entire ruckus that happened

when the infected dog dropped the
egg?

They beat on the door, they
slammed their bodies against it,
and they kept moaning and
scratching, hitting and weeping,
smelling my fear. However, the rain
stopped quickly, and they ran away.

I am writing this now, because
I'm scared of them. I came back to
the city, but maybe I should have
let them take me.

Instead, I've brought this
plague with me, back to the city.
They are on the other side of my
door, and it's raining outside. It
has been for a long time.

Because even now, even though we
don't know about them...

Deep inside, we still fear them.

Oh God, the rain won't stop.
It's been 3 days, and I'm beginning
to lose it.

They claw the door, and I don't
know how much more it will resist.

They are taking it down. They
smell my fea-

Slenderman

The following is a witness's
reencounter of their incident with
The Slender Man

After waking up with a jolt, the
girl laid in bed a few seconds
longer. Reaching over to switch on
her bedside lamp, she tried to
remember exactly what had stolen
her sweet slumber away. When she
couldn't, the brunette swung her
legs over the side of the bed and
heaved herself up. Checking the
time on her phone, she snorted when
she saw it was midnight: the
witching hour. Knowing that sleep
would only evade her, she left her
bedroom for the kitchen, a good cup
of coffee on her mind.

As she passed by her front door,
a chill spread like liquid fire
down her spine. It's only winter,
she told herself, focusing again on
the coffee plan. Measuring out
scoops, water, and preparing her

cup kept her occupied, but as the
dark liquid boiled, she had nothing
left to keep her mind from
wandering off. The chill returned
and she couldn't help but glance
behind her to the front door. It
stood there innocently enough, just
like always. The deadbolt was still
in place and she could see nothing
amiss with it. Turning back to her
coffee, she did her best to forget
about the feeling.

With her cup in hand, she
started back towards her bedroom.
As she walked by the front door,
she decided that a quick glance out
of the peephole would help calm her
restless thoughts. The chill
worsened with each step she took
towards the door and further away
from the safety and warmth of her
blankets. She pressed her empty
hand against the cold, metal door
and took a deep breath before
leading her eye to the peephole.

At first, she could only see an
inky blackness and somehow seemed
to swirl in itself. When she

blinked in surprise, the void melted away. She wished it hadn't. In it's place, there stood what she could only guess was once a man. The limbs were long and inhumanly awkward, with bulky joints branching off into several arms, not unlike the branches of a tree. The creature was draped in a black suit, somehow making the thing more nightmarish to her. The icing on the proverbial cake, however, was what passed as the hellish thing's face? It was as though her mind blurred the ghastly visage to spare itself further shock and horror.

She shoved herself away from the door with the hand still pressed against it. The scalding mug of coffee fell, the liquid burning her bare legs as she fell backwards and tried to crawl away from the door. She knew, somehow, that her mind hadn't been playing tricks on her. As she crab walked away from the door, she watched as tendrils as black as the void itself snake around through the cracks. The girl was trapped between the instinct to

flee and the gut feeling to not turn her back on the door. When the door jolted, the urge to flee overcame her and she slipped in the burning liquid as she tried to make it back to her room.

She knew deep down that she was trapping herself in a corner, but she had to get away from the door. The girl was halfway down the hallway when she heard the previously locked door creak open. She screamed and slipped into a wall, cracking her chin on it and stunning her.

After that, there was only blackness.-

"Nicole?" a warm, male voice snapped the woman out of her trance. As she turned around, she was met by one of her sister's doctor's. She nodded, not sure if she should say anything, or even if she could find her voice if she did have something to say. That morning, she had gotten an urgent phone call from the hospital, saying that her sister, Lindsay,

was there. Before they had even let her see her, the doctor's had pulled her off to the side and insisted that they talk to her about what might have happened. Phrases like 'self-inflicted' and 'assault' had been thrown around and Nicole felt her mind reel.

She still hadn't fully understood what they had been saying until she saw Lindsay with her own eyes. Her little sister had a bandage wrapped around her head, covering both of her ears as well as her eyes. They said it was to keep her now deadened eyes from drying out and to try to keep infection out of the wounds Lindsay had made to her ears. The doctors had guessed that either she or someone else had jammed a pencil into them to keep her off balance or to deafen herself against something. There was the mix of first and second degree burns on her hands, legs, and feet, from what was assumed to be the coffee her neighbors found slipped all over the entry to her apartment.

As Nicole walked into her sister's hospital room the first time, she thought she had spied the silhouette of a man in the window. That, she knew, was impossible. Her sister's room was on the third story of the hospital.

Morgan's Corner

AUTHOR'S NOTICE: *"Many of you have most likely heard similar stories like this in the past. The reason I wrote this is because it's always been a story I've heard growing up, and I thought writing a spinoff of it would be interesting. I could have sworn it was only a local legend. I suppose that's been proven wrong. Anyway, here you go."*

My boyfriend Steven and I said our goodbyes, and we got into his car ready to leave the party. It was about 11 o'clock at night and pitch black outside—so dark you could hardly see your hand 3 inches from your face. It was rather chilly that night, for it was the beginning of spring still yet. The

wind was blowing ferociously, trees swaying, crashing their leaves into others. We were about 20 miles away from town, on the overgrown low populated area just outward. Often through the blackness we were encountered with a sudden turn, threatening to throw us off of the road into nearby trees.

Fortuitously we survived those turns—but just 10 miles away from town our car ran out of gas. We were still rather far away, with no houses or manmade structures anywhere within a 2-mile radius. It reminded me of a jungle. Steven pulled the car to the side of the road. Neither of us owned cellular phones at the time, and we were in need of help. "I saw a gas station just a mile back. I'll be right back." He said, pulling himself out of the car. I was concerned about him—and I'm sure he felt the same about me. "Are you sure you'll be okay? It's dark, and who knows what kind of things are out there. Let me come with you." The next words he told me would replay in my head

for the rest of my life. "Sheri. Whatever you do, don't leave the car." "But—" I attempted to reply. "Don't leave the car." He said again even more stern than the first time. His eyes locked on mine coldly for a few seconds, so I decided maybe it would be better if I were obedient.

My mind began to change as time went by. 30 minutes. An hour passed by still with no sign of him.

The atmosphere I was in was so very eerie— Wind whistling, trees all around hiding who-knows-what in the darkness behind. About an hour and a half since he left, I began to hear a noise—like something was just barely tapping the roof. "Tap... Tap... Tap..." I was at the same time curious and frightened to see what it was, but my beloved boyfriend's voice echoed in my mind. "Whatever you do, don't leave the car." I decided to wait until morning and try to get some sleep, but I wasn't sure how much I could get with that noise coming from the roof. Soon

enough though, I drifted off without even realizing it... In the morning I saw that my boyfriend still wasn't back yet- My mind was racing with thoughts of what may have happened to him. I noticed that the tapping hadn't stopped, and since it was daytime I decided to disregard what my boyfriend had said and go outside.

I would live to this day regretting not listening to him. As I stepped outside and turned around to shut the car door, my jaw dropped at the sight, which I saw. I saw my boyfriend hanging upside down- his legs were tied to vines from a tree that was right next to the road. His entire stomach was cut open, forming a pool of blood on the roof of the car. And his hands... His hands were just barely touching the roof-making the slightest

"Tap... Tap... Tap..."

The Russian Sleep Experiment

Russian researchers in the late 1940s kept five people awake for fifteen days using an experimental gas based stimulant. They were kept in a sealed environment to carefully monitor their oxygen intake so the gas didn't kill them, since it was toxic in high concentrations. This was before closed circuit cameras so they had only microphones and 5-inch thick glass porthole sized windows into the chamber to monitor them. The chamber was stocked with books, cots to sleep on but no bedding, running water and toilet, and enough dried food to last all five for over a month.

The test subjects were political prisoners deemed enemies of the state during World War II.

Everything was fine for the first five days; the subjects hardly complained having been promised (falsely) that they would be freed if they submitted to the

test and did not sleep for 30 days. Their conversations and activities were monitored and it was noted that they continued to talk about increasingly traumatic incidents in their past, and the general tone of their conversations took on a darker aspect after the 4 day mark.

After five days they started to complain about the circumstances and events that lead them to where they were and started to demonstrate severe paranoia. They stopped talking to each other and began alternately whispering to the microphones and one way mirrored portholes. Oddly they all seemed to think they could win the trust of the experimenters by turning over their comrades, the other subjects in captivity with them. At first the researchers suspected this was an effect of the gas itself...

After nine days the first of them started screaming. He ran the length of the chamber repeatedly yelling at the top of his lungs for 3 hours straight, he continued

attempting to scream but was only able to produce occasional squeaks. The researchers postulated that he had physically torn his vocal cords. The most surprising thing about this behavior is how the other captives reacted to it... or rather didn't react to it. They continued whispering to the microphones until the second of the captives started to scream. The 2 non-screaming captives took the books apart, smeared page after page with their own feces and pasted them calmly over the glass portholes. The screaming promptly stopped.

So did the whispering to the microphones.

After 3 more days passed. The researchers checked the microphones hourly to make sure they were working, since they thought it impossible that no sound could be coming with 5 people inside. The oxygen consumption in the chamber indicated that all 5 must still be alive. In fact it was the amount of

oxygen 5 people would consume at a very heavy level of strenuous exercise. On the morning of the 14th day the researchers did something they said they would not do to get a reaction from the captives, they used the intercom inside the chamber, hoping to provoke any response from the captives they were afraid were either dead or vegetables.

They announced: "We are opening the chamber to test the microphones step away from the door and lie flat on the floor or you will be shot. Compliance will earn one of you your immediate freedom."

To their surprise they heard a single phrase in a calm voice response: "We no longer want to be freed."

Debate broke out among the researchers and the military forces funding the research. Unable to provoke any more response using the intercom it was finally decided to open the chamber at midnight on the fifteenth day.

The chamber was flushed of the stimulant gas and filled with fresh air and immediately voices from the microphones began to object. 3 different voices began begging, as if pleading for the life of loved ones to turn the gas back on. The chamber was opened and soldiers sent in to retrieve the test subjects. They began to scream louder than ever, and so did the soldiers when they saw what was inside. Four of the five subjects were still alive, although no one could rightly call the state that any of them in 'life.'

The food rations past day 5 had not been so much as touched. There were chunks of meat from the dead test subject's thighs and chest stuffed into the drain in the center of the chamber, blocking the drain and allowing 4 inches of water to accumulate on the floor. Precisely how much of the water on the floor was actually blood was never determined. All four 'surviving' test subjects also had large portions of muscle and skin

torn away from their bodies. The destruction of flesh and exposed bone on their finger tips indicated that the wounds were inflicted by hand, not with teeth as the researchers initially thought. Closer examination of the position and angles of the wounds indicated that most if not all of them were self-inflicted.

The abdominal organs below the ribcage of all four test subjects had been removed. While the heart, lungs and diaphragm remained in place, the skin and most of the muscles attached to the ribs had been ripped off, exposing the lungs through the ribcage. All the blood vessels and organs remained intact; they had just been taken out and laid on the floor, fanning out around the eviscerated but still living bodies of the subjects. The digestive tract of all four could be seen to be working, digesting food. It quickly became apparent that what they were digesting was their own flesh that they had

ripped off and eaten over the course of days.

Most of the soldiers were Russian special operatives at the facility, but still many refused to return to the chamber to remove the test subjects. They continued to scream to be left in the chamber and alternately begged and demanded that the gas be turned back on, lest they fall asleep...

To everyone's surprise the test subjects put up a fierce fight in the process of being removed from the chamber. One of the Russian soldiers died from having his throat ripped out, another was gravely injured by having his testicles ripped off and an artery in his leg severed by one of the subject's teeth. Another 5 of the soldiers lost their lives if you count ones that committed suicide in the weeks following the incident.

In the struggle one of the four living subjects had his spleen ruptured and he bled out almost

immediately. The medical researchers attempted to sedate him but this proved impossible. He was injected with more than ten times the human dose of a morphine derivative and still fought like a cornered animal, breaking the ribs and arm of one doctor. When heart was seen to beat for a full two minutes after he had bled out to the point there was more air in his vascular system than blood. Even after it stopped he continued to scream and flail for another 3 minutes, struggling to attack anyone in reach and just repeating the word "MORE" over and over, weaker and weaker, until he finally fell silent.

The surviving three test subjects were heavily restrained and moved to a medical facility, the two with intact vocal cords continuously begging for the gas demanding to be kept awake...

The most injured of the three was taken to the only surgical operating room that the facility

had. In the process of preparing the subject to have his organs placed back within his body it was found that he was effectively immune to the sedative they had given him to prepare him for the surgery. He fought furiously against his restraints when the anesthetic gas was brought out to put him under. He managed to tear most of the way through a 4-inch wide leather strap on one wrist, even through the weight of a 200-pound soldier holding that wrist as well. It took only a little more anesthetic than normal to put him under, and the instant his eyelids fluttered and closed, his heart stopped. In the autopsy of the test subject that died on the operating table it was found that his blood had triple the normal level of oxygen. His muscles that were still attached to his skeleton were badly torn and he had broken 9 bones in his struggle to not be subdued. Most of them were from the force his own muscles had exerted on them.

The second survivor had been the first of the group of five to start screaming. His vocal cords destroyed he was unable to beg or object to surgery, and he only reacted by shaking his head violently in disapproval when the anesthetic gas was brought near him. He shook his head yes when someone suggested, reluctantly, they try the surgery without anesthetic, and did not react for the entire 6-hour procedure of replacing his abdominal organs and attempting to cover them with what remained of his skin. The surgeon presiding stated repeatedly that it should be medically possible for the patient to still be alive. One terrified nurse assisting the surgery stated that she had seen the patients mouth curl into a smile several times, whenever his eyes met hers.

When the surgery ended the subject looked at the surgeon and began to wheeze loudly, attempting to talk while struggling. Assuming this must be something of drastic

importance the surgeon had a pen and pad fetched so the patient could write his message. It was simple. "Keep cutting."

The other two test subjects were given the same surgery, both without anesthetic as well. Although they had to be injected with a paralytic for the duration of the operation; the surgeon found it impossible to perform the operation while the patients laughed continuously. Once paralyzed the subjects could only follow the attending researchers with their eyes. The paralytic cleared their system in an abnormally short period of time and they were soon trying to escape their bonds. The moment they could speak they were again asking for the stimulant gas. The researchers tried asking why they had injured themselves, why they had ripped out their own guts and why they wanted to be given the gas again.

Only one response was given: "I must remain awake."

All three subject's restraints were reinforced and they were placed back into the chamber awaiting determination as to what should be done with them. The researchers, facing the wrath of their military 'benefactors' for having failed the stated goals of their project considered euthanizing the surviving subjects. The commanding officer, an ex-KGB instead saw potential, and wanted to see what would happen if they were put back on the gas. The researchers strongly objected, but were overruled.

In preparation for being sealed in the chamber again the subjects were connected to an EEG monitor and had their restraints padded for long term confinement. To everyone's surprise all three stopped struggling the moment it was let slip that they were going back on the gas. It was obvious that at this point all three were putting up a great struggle to stay awake. One of subjects that could speak was humming loudly and

continuously; the mute subject was straining his legs against the leather bonds with all his might, first left, then right, then left again for something to focus on. The remaining subject was holding his head off his pillow and blinking rapidly. Having been the first to be wired for EEG most of the researchers were monitoring his brain waves in surprise. They were normal most of the time but sometimes flat lined inexplicably. It looked as if he were repeatedly suffering brain death, before returning to normal. As they focused on paper scrolling out of the brainwave monitor only one nurse saw his eyes slip shut at the same moment his head hit the pillow. His brainwaves immediately changed to that of deep sleep, then flat lined for the last time as his heart simultaneously stopped.

The only remaining subject that could speak started screaming to be sealed in now. His brainwaves showed the same flat lines as one who had just died from falling

asleep. The commander gave the order to seal the chamber with both subjects inside, as well as 3 researchers. One of the named three immediately drew his gun and shot the commander point blank between the eyes, then turned the gun on the mute subject and blew his brains out as well.

He pointed his gun at the remaining subject, still restrained to a bed as the remaining members of the medical and research team fled the room. "I won't be locked in here with these things! Not with you!" he screamed at the man strapped to the table. "WHAT ARE YOU?" he demanded. "I must know!"

The subject smiled.

"Have you forgotten so easily?" The subject asked. "We are you. We are the madness that lurks within you all, begging to be free at every moment in your deepest animal mind. We are what you hide from in your beds every night. We are what you sedate into silence and paralysis when you go to the

nocturnal haven where we cannot tread."

The researcher paused. Then aimed at the subject's heart and fired. The EEG flat lined as the subject weakly choked out, "So... nearly... free..."

Huntsville Camping Trip

I went camping about three weekends ago in the Huntsville national forest in Texas. 3 friends and me that came home for the weekend, they are all in college and usually we all get together at least once a year, old friends from high school. For the camping trip we planned to go backpacking deep in the forest, live off of fish that we catch and animals that we can trap. We have been doing this for a while in Texas and in numerous places, Arizona, Colorado (if anyone is familiar with the Spanish peaks there), New Mexico, so we're pretty much used to anything you'd encounter out there.

It was my turn to pick where we went camping, so I chose Huntsville (more accurately it's Huntsville/New Waverly). So we drive up there, park our car in a camping park spot, and start walking off into the forest. We had some laughs along the way, everyone catching up with each other's lives. We walked until it started to get dark and set up camp where we stopped. Everyone gathered wood to make a fire and we set our tent up. And we do what we always do: try and scare each other with weird stories.

Around this time we started to smell something very faint. It was noticeable, but not overbearing. We couldn't put our finger on what it was, so we just carried on. Mike had to go piss and he walked off in the forest. A second later he came running back, piss all down his jeans like he'd missed really bad. Immediately we all crack up and throw some jokes at him. Then we noticed that he was white as snow and trying to catch his breath. He

starts screaming for us to follow him, and runs off.

We all get serious and go follow him, not knowing what the problem was. We start to hear a faint scream and crying in the distance, in the direction we were running. It was pitch black away from the camp and Mike had the only flash light (we left ours at the camp, he had his from his trip taking a piss), so at this stage we didn't have much choice but to follow the light, which was frantically pointing here and there in front of him.

The scream gets closer and Mike starts to slow down. We then notice a ratty old cabin that looked like it was abandoned, except for a faint light that we could see from one of the old mildew covered windows. The crying was intense: whoever it was couldn't breathe enough to let out a full yell. We all followed Mike up to the front door and we could all hear the

crying from inside. As soon as he knocked on the door it stopped.

We all waited and heard really heavy footsteps walking fast to the door. There was a giant slam against the door and the sound of a bolt unlocking. Then nothing. We waited for a bit, knocked a few more times, but still nothing happened. We walked around the house (there was no fucking way any of us were leaving each other's side) and noticed a window, which was a good way up. Alex took a deep breath and said asked us to give him a boost so he could see inside. Mike and me lifted him up to the window. We watched him brush away dirt and webs from the window and place his face close to the window to try and see something.

There was a quick beat. Then suddenly he breathed in fast and let out a loud scream. Then he fell back from the window, screaming bloody murder the whole way. We all tried to calm him down but he was hysterical. We went to him but he

started to shake, punch, kick, cuss, you name it, and then took off towards the camp.

None of us wanted to be separated so we all ran close behind him. We caught up to him and grabbed him and set him down. The fire was dying out so I grabbed some nearby wood that we collected added it to the fire. My hands were shaking and I had to do something. I went back to Alex and we all tried to calm him down. He wouldn't he kept screaming and was breathing so hard that he eventually fainted.

All of us are terrified now, and we all kept the fire high until sunrise. Periodically Alex kept waking up, screaming just like before. By sunrise he was up and looked catatonic, just mumbling to himself and whimpering.

Mike and me decide to go look at the cabin now it was daylight. We searched where we thought it was, except there was nothing there... Nothing at all. The indistinct smell from last night had now grown

into a very strong smell of something dead, something stale. We headed back to the camping site. When we got there we found Alex had chewed into the sides of his face and swallowed so much blood that he was throwing up. John was at his back, and he looked like he was about to die from exhaustion. I guess we all looked that way, I just didn't notice until I saw his face. Alex said, quietly, that we need to leave. Now.

We all started to pack up the tent. It started to rain really heavily (it was about noon) and the sky started to grow really dark. Alex started to go into a panic. He went and grabbed a large stick and yelled at us to leave it and leave, now, or he'd knock us out and drag us out of there himself. Mike started to yell at him, and they started to fight. We broke it up and finished packing, and then started to make our way back. After a little while we arrived at a creek we had crossed the previous day, only it was flooded over, and

the water was moving too fast for us to cross it. Alex started to scream again, yelling at Mike for taking his time packing up the tent when we could have gotten out of here. This went on for a while until we finally convinced Alex to calm down and tell us what happened.

He said as soon as he put his face to the glass, a face on the other side did the same thing, and started to smile really big. It had dark eyes and a dark mouth which was much bigger than Alex's, as the smile got as large as it could. A giant shadow behind it swung something down and sliced its face off. The face was stuck to the window, and he said it started to laugh quietly as it slid down. Mike, still pissed off (and though he wouldn't admit it, beginning to get freaked out), started to argue with him again. We eventually started to follow the creek for a way to cross.

We then started to see toys floating in the creek. They were really old toys, old Barbie dolls and baby dolls. This wasn't like any old trash floating in the creek, though... this was a lot of Barbie's, a lot of baby dolls. One washed towards the side and Mike picked it up. It had some kind of voice chip that was dying and started to say some gurgling words we couldn't understand, followed by it's sad excuse for laughter. Then it sounded like it was whispering. We thought the batteries must be dying, he threw it down.

We kept going, and the sun was starting to set. Alex was freaking out more now, and was whimpering and breathing heavily. We all started to see shadows move behind trees, something we all called BS on until we all were seeing it. It was barely light out and we stop as we see the cabin right in front of us. None of us knows what to think. Mike says, "This is bullshit, I'm going in there." Alex tries to stop him. We all do, all of us just

wanted to go home. Mike says to all of us to fuck off, do our own thing, he doesn't care anymore, and this is all bull. We start to hear hundreds of the same sort baby doll as before, laughing, whispering and trying to sing. We start to move forward past the cabin, all of us, and kept pushing forward. We smelled something dead in the air, something stale. It was the same something as before. We started to hear something crying, and something screaming. We kept on going. We eventually crossed the creek and left the woods. We went back to our vehicle and got in. Its pitch black, and we drive. We are about to get on the 45 to Houston but the road is under construction and can't be accessed. It points to a detour. As we head towards the detour it seems to be small, bumpy dirt road going into the woods.

We then see a young girl come up to us. She looks like she was in trouble, young and pretty. She approaches the passenger side door and she looks like she's really

drugged up, or beaten up. Alex doesn't roll down the windows, nor does he open the door. She reaches for the handle and he immediately locks it. She puts her face on the window and starts to smile really big. We floor it, Alex starts to cry and scream and we are all breathing heavy. We finally cut on a street that takes us to the 45 and we take it the whole way. When we get back to my apartment everyone doesn't know what to say and we all break apart and go our separate ways.

Mike messages me later and says he is going to go back. I try to convince him not to and all he does is say it was our own minds that were screwing with us. I think he just went to prove to himself he wasn't scared. I can smell that stench everywhere now. I don't go out anymore, I just stay in and don't answer the door. Last week everyone I met was acting really strange, people that I knew for a long time and total strangers. My own dad, when I went to his place

to eat supper with him he just watched me, strangely, when I was sitting down. He didn't say a word the whole time. I kept asking him "What's wrong?" He just slowly shook his head.

When I was leaving to go home I turned to wave. He had black eyes and an open mouth like he was in pain. When I started to walk back he shut the door and bolted it. I stayed there knocking and knocking. Nothing. I called him, and his phone was disconnected. I even called the police. Halfway through the questions they were asking me the connection started to fade into static. I could hear a faint mumbling, singing and laughing.

Mike has completely vanished. There is not even a record of him being alive. When I call Alex's house they talk to me like I'm some salesman. They say they don't know any Alex and to please stop calling. The person who tells me that is Alex's mother. I can't get ahold of John. Someone knocked on

my door and when I went to look I saw a face completely covering the peephole and a giant smile started to form.

I called the cops again and instead of it turning into static they got really strange. "Sir, are you affected by any drugs at the moment?" "No." "Are you coming home anytime soon?" "Excuse me?" "Come home." and the phone call ended. My mail slot swings every now and then. Someone is sliding pieces of baby dolls through it. I try to call people now and all I can hear is static and bad baby doll noises and this crying and screaming. My TV is busted but when I go to piss I can hear it on. I might be going insane.

Whoever lives above me started to scream in pain and crying deeply recently. I hear giant footsteps from their apartment; I hear bangs and something falling to the ground. From the neighbors to the right of my apartment I hear what sounds like a baby that never gets

tended too and then it sounds like a baby doll whose batteries are dying. My phone has been ringing now and it's Alex telling me things in a language that I have never heard before, nor could even manage to repeat. I kept getting emails of pictures of black and small colorations, now I can't even access my email. Someone knocks on the door, and then they slam against it. I hear the bolts unlocking one by one and I run to make sure to lock all of them back.

Then, I sit down and begin to cry. . . .

The Willow Men

There's a local legend where I come from. They're simply referred to as the willow men.

There's hardly a need for the law enforcement in this town. The willow men take care of all that. Every single step taken, every word spoken, every drop of blood spilt; the willow men know about it before anyone else. Believe me, anyone

that has invoked the wrath of the willow men has gone missing without a trace.

That's why when I realized what I had done it was too late. The willow men were coming.

She just wouldn't shut the hell up. No matter what I said and what I would do she was just hysterical. She kept pacing about the house screaming. She said she found this and that and knew I was cheating on her. She'd ask me who it was and I told her she was crazy. I guess I wore that excuse out. After a while, I couldn't take her damn voice anymore. I'd walk room to room and she'd follow me. When we got to the kitchen I had my fill.

I reached for the first knife I could find and jammed it into her throat. The face of anger and sorrow melted into one of despair and disbelief. The crimson fluid ran freely all over her blouse and she dropped to her knees, scrambling around on the floor. She clawed at the tile and made

gurgling noises, which only served to infuriate me. I grabbed an iron skillet that had been pre-heating on the stove and took a swing at her head. A wet crack followed the impact and while I didn't need to keep going I did.

I lost count of the number of times I hit her but I had a good deal of blood on me. What was left of her head was being held together by thin particles of bone and blood continued to rush out. I dropped the skillet to the floor with a loud clang. I wish remorse could have followed so I would've felt at least a bit human but it didn't. I was just happy to be rid of her. With a grunt I picked her body up off the floor and hoisted it unto my shoulder. Her face hung next to me, dead eyes staring with conviction. I could only chuckle. As soon as I got outside, I dropped the ragged heap onto the ground and went to find a shovel. That's when I knew they were watching.

I could hear the whispers from the woods and in the corners of my eyes I could see them staring intently at my every move. Whenever I would look up to the woods I would find only gnarled trees staring back at me. I knew they were there. It was dusk by the time she was good and buried. I was drenched in sweat and it had made the bloodstains on my clothes expand and turn orange. I looked back up to the woods and I saw them peering from behind the trees; long, gnarled faces with hollow eyes and gaunt figures. I could only half see the faces as they chose to hide behind their precious trees but they were there. Watching, whispering...

"What are you staring for, bastards?! You heard her! I had to do it," I yelled at them.

Was I expecting a response? I don't know. They just continued to watch me from behind the trees. I spit on the ground and threw the shovel down. They would come for me

under cover of darkness and I wasn't going without a fight. I stole away into the house and prepared. I pushed couches and dressers in front of doorways. I nailed wooden boards haphazardly to cover all the windows. As the sun crept underneath the horizon a great trepidation settled in the pit of my stomach. Was it honestly nerves? I hated to think it was such a powerful fear that I would start breaking into an ice cold sweat. I loaded up my shotgun and reached for a bottle of whiskey. I forced down a mouthful and then another and slammed the rest of the bottle against the wall in frustration.

One door I left open. It was the back door that stared out to the woods. I put a chair down in front of it and sat, shotgun in my lap. They were still staring at me; the willow men. We stayed staring at one another for three days. Eventually, exhaustion began to get the best of me and I started to nod off. I tried desperately to keep my

eyes open. For a foolish second I propped my head up with the shotgun so that it wouldn't fall. I snapped back to reason and lifted my head high. Last thing I wanted to do was shoot myself. Had I known what was coming I probably should have.

I pushed myself to stay up for a few more hours. The day came and went and it was the dead of night before I knew it. They persisted behind the trees. I began to rationalize that if I closed my eyes for a second, I could have enough time to open them while the willow men were coming at me so I could take a few down. Smiling I did just that. Of course, its' difficult to tell how long you were asleep. Could be a second, could be for days. I opened my eyes again and found I was still sitting in my chair with my shotgun in my lap. I snapped up when I saw that the willow men were no longer behind the trees. I flipped out and held the shotgun up, darting around barrel first. I took a few steps outside and tried to control my

heavy breaths. I shook damn near uncontrollably and found it impossible to keep the gun steady.

I began to calm down when I didn't see anything outside and began to return to my post when I stopped dead in my tracks. I felt tears well in my eyes and something began to push up and out of my throat. The willow men were peering from around the doorway and the sides of the house. I froze staring at their gnarled up faces and branch-like hands. I had to do something. I pulled the gun up and fired off a round. It managed to take out part of the doorframe but it missed any of them altogether. I popped open the shotgun and madly grasped for a fresh shell in my pocket. I successfully reloaded it and lifted the gun back up.

The willow men continued to look at me from where they had been. I took careful aim this time and fired once more. Another shot hit the doorframe this time although closer to the willow men. I fumbled

for a third round and as I did, I saw a large shadow cover me. Looking up, the willow men were upon me. I screamed and closed the barrel down on my thumb effectively severing it. Immediately after that, I lost all consciousness and collapsed.

When I awoke, it was ice cold. My vision began to return to me slowly and I could feel that I was being dragged. My heart sank when I looked around. Darkness stretched as far as the eye could see and I knew I was in the deepest part of the woods. Where my thumb had once been was black and swollen and had managed to numb up to my forearm. My ankles were in severe pain too but I didn't know why. When I looked, I saw that they had been clearly snapped and the willow men were dragging me by my feet. I began to scream as loudly as possible for someone, anyone.

All I did was cause more willow men to appear and watch me from behind the strangest willow trees

I'd ever seen. Their trunks were small and looked just like leather. The earth around them was red and moist yet where I was being dragged was dry, rugged land. I looked up to the canopy and wish I hadn't. Skinless corpses hung down, bloods dripping freely to feed what I now knew were flesh-bound trees. My screams were swallowed by the dark and my throat gave out, hoarse from the strain. In the silence, I heard a faint moaning.

I looked around to see if there was someone else here for some poor bastard who suffered my same fate. To my horror, I discovered the source of the moans. The bodies hanging on the branches of the trees were all still alive. Soon, I too would have my flesh torn asunder and be damned to hang up there and feed the hungry willow trees. There was nothing I could but accept my fate. The willow men had me.

String Theory

Have you ever had an experience that suggested someone else was in your house, and just thought, "I don't wanna know" and left it? Sometimes, fear of the unknown just seems like the preferable option than facing a real, concrete danger. Normally it's nothing, though. One time, the beeper function of my wireless house phone went off, when I was the only one home. It could only be called from the living room. Another time, I swear someone took some change from my desk. They're all probably just slightly disconcerting tricks of the memory.

But what would you do when something truly suggestive happens? Would you run, or just ignore it, like I did?

Last Monday was a normal day. I got up, brushed my teeth, changed into school clothes... All little parts of my morning ritual. It seemed like it would be another totally un-noteworthy day, until I saw the strings.

There were three or four thick twine strings in my room. They crisscrossed between the walls around my bed, one attached to the door. No way would I have missed them before; I should have tripped over them. They were tied to pins in the walls, which had also not existed before ten seconds ago.

Nobody could have been in my room while I was in it, let alone set this up. It was early, and my brain wasn't processing correctly. I simply discredited the sight, untied the strings and left for school, leaving them balled up on my desk.

It didn't get any better later. Outside my house there were hundreds of them, tied between houses, around cars, across streets... This had to be some super elaborate prank. One of those hidden camera shows, or a comedy improv blog. They had gotten everyone else to play along too; passers-by were tangled in them, tying them to objects they were

walking towards and away from, as if they had been and were continuing to follow the course laid out for them.

I nervously continued my journey to school. On the bus, every except me was tied to the door. At school, groups of friends were tied to each other; teachers were tied to their desks and boards. Oddly enough, at this point all I could wonder was why I had been left out.

When my friend Lucy sat beside me in first period, she simply plunked her bag down on my lap and rested her chin in her hand, looking right past me to the window outside.

"Hey Lucy."

No response.

"Come on, I didn't expect you to be in on this too. "

She sighed and started taking books from her bag. All the books were tied to her hands. I grinned, and yanked one of the strings off a

book. She didn't seem to notice, instead simply disregarding the book completely, letting it drop to the floor without a moment's hesitation.

"Um." I leaned down, picking up her book and placing it back on her desk. She took no notice.

"Well, if that's how we're gonna play it." I smiled, trying to look playful, but really just trying to hide my nervousness. I bundled all the strings attached to her together with one hand, then pulled them all free. She blinked, turning to stare at me.

"Holy crap, Martin. You're like a ninja or something."

"I've been sitting here for maybe ten minutes." I smiled again; relieved my friend had finally "noticed" me.

"Where did all these strings come from??" She gasped, seemingly noticing for the first time. "I assumed you were all fucking with me..."

She stood up, backing into a corner. No one else in the class noticed.

"They weren't here just a minute ago! Do you see them too??" Her tone made it clear she was genuinely scared.

"No. Didn't you-. " I was interrupted by my teacher slamming the door behind her. Everyone except Lucy and me murmured a good morning, and still, no one seemed to pay either of us any notice. "People have been ignoring me all day." I said to Lucy, before turning to our teacher. "Hey! Dumb bitch! You can't teach for shit!"

No reaction.

"I'm getting away from all this shit." Lucy pulled a few strings aside and left the class. I followed, and surprise-surprise, no one else noticed.

We wandered the corridors, leaving and entering classes as we saw fit. Whenever we untied a chair or book from someone else, it was

like it suddenly didn't matter to them. It didn't exist.

I showed her the street outside; there were twice as many more strings than when I came in this morning. We carefully picked our way through the tangle, making our way to a nearby coffee shop. Not particularly grand, I know. But what would you do in our situation? As I said, fear of the unknown sometimes seems like the safer option. On a few occasions, I suggested we untie a few more people. Lucy was opposed to it, remembering how terrified she'd been.

In the coffee shop, we grabbed a couple of sandwiches and drinks from the fridge. We found a table, untied all strings attached to the chairs, and sat down. We both ate in silence, both of us too scared, both of us distracting ourselves by watching the strangers in the shop, oblivious to the strings. After twenty minutes, Lucy spoke up. "Now she's gonna take that sandwich."

She said, pointing at a woman across the shop. Sure enough, she walked to the fridge and took the plastic wrapped sandwich she was tied to. "She pays for it and leaves." She did so, according to the prophecies of the strings. "That guy doesn't intend to pay." I watched as a man took his coffee and ran out of the store, the two servers just looking too exasperated to go after him.

"This is horrible." She whimpered. "Let's go. Please."

Outside wasn't much better. Everyone just followed the strings' instructions, going about their daily lives. Lucy announced she was going home to sleep this off, and I agreed to walk her home. She only lived ten minutes away.

Away from the busier part of town there were fewer strings. It was nicer; we could pretend it wasn't happening.

When we turned onto Lucy's street, she stopped, her mouth falling open.

"What now?" I broke the silence, my voice sounding surprisingly small.

"Look." She pointed outside one of her neighbor's houses.

I saw it clearly, and I'll take my memory of that moment 'til the day I die. A little dark imp, maybe three feet tall, walked along with its knuckles on the ground, almost like a monkey. It had two bulbous yellow eyes taking up about half its face, and no mouth or any other facial features. It was holding a hammer and a ball of twine, which it was letting out behind it.

It walked quickly and quietly from the front door of the house to the mailbox. It stopped, hammered a nail into the side of the box, and tied its string around it. It turned to face us, and stopped when it spotted us.

My bottom fell out even further than it had already been, but it just stared with a look of surprise and curiosity. You could almost say it was the more frightened one. Suddenly, it beckoned to us with its tiny hand.

I looked at Lucy, she hadn't moved. I looked back at the imp, which stared at me. I halved the distance between us, and then halved it again. This wasn't fear of the unknown anymore; it was fear of this little guy. Didn't seem like anything to be scared of. When I was a meter away from it, it extended its hand.

"Uh. Hi." I shook it. It nodded in approval, blinking its massive yellow eyes up at me.

"So you're the ones in charge of the strings?" It nodded eagerly. I called Lucy over, but she stayed where she was.

"There are more of you?" Another nod. I wanted to ask it so many questions, about what it was and

where it came from, but it seemed for now I was stuck with only yes or no questions.

"Do we even have free will?"

It just looked at me, almost sadly. I immediately felt sick to my stomach, and couldn't bear looking at the little monster anymore. I grabbed Lucy, who had been listening to our exchange, and now sat on the curb with her head in her hands.

"Come on."

We entered her house, and I made her a cup of tea. When I found her in the living room, she had untied her dog and was curled up with it, crying. I set the tea down and sat beside her.

"I'm so scared." She whispered after a good ten minutes of sobbing. I didn't answer. I couldn't.

"I'm going to sleep" She mumbled suddenly, and was under within the minute. Sleep was starting to sound

pretty good all of a sudden, my eyelids suddenly felt like they were being weighed down.

I collapsed to the rug, and the last thing I heard before I fell asleep was the scurrying of several sets of little feet nearby.

I felt much better the next day, as if the whole affair had been a dream. I'd probably have believed that if Lucy's mother hadn't awaked me that morning, wondering what I was doing sleeping over without permission or something.

Over breakfast, Lucy asked me why I looked so pale and nervous. I turned to her and smiled, mumbling something to her about feeling sick.

But the truth was, I was scared because I couldn't see any strings, and was wondering whether my actions were truly my own.

Prey

My story takes place in a town you've probably never heard of in

southeastern rural Kentucky. It's a small town with its people sparsely peppering the mountainsides to and fro. It's the type of town where it isn't exactly unusual to find neighbors bartering for goods with livestock, living off what the land provides, and making do with what they've got. It is here that my father was raised. It is here that my father raised his family.

My father was a proud man; short, barely 5'7", but stout. He was a mountaineer, carpenter, a survivor, and a hunter, but mostly, he was proud. He instilled in me all the virtues that I believe in today. He's the type of man that would give you the last dollar to his name. The type that would go hungry to make sure his children were fed, and there were times that he did. I suppose I should clarify that I grew up in poverty. No doubt there were those that were worse off than me, but times were hard nonetheless. My father worked intermittently, mostly in construction. There were few homes

within the community that my father did not at least help with. He built our house from the ground up, dug out the basement, and leveled the land with little more than a shovel, wheel barrel, and the helping hands of my uncle and two older brothers. Our house sat on a hillside, in a leveled alcove; the yard stretched on for what seemed like forever, ending at a fresh mountain brook where the woodland lied beyond.

He spent a lot of time in those woods – hiking trails, digging ginseng, hunting, and otherwise passing time. The mountains provided our family with many necessities. Our water was pumped from a mine near the mountain's peak. Our food consisted mainly of game and livestock. My mother is a wonderful cook. She had a fondness for chicken – which we raised. My father, on the other hand, preferred game. No stranger to the culinary arts, my father was adept at preparing a variety of dishes, all of which he tracked and killed

himself. Long before the sun would rise, my father would grab his light and head out. He would follow the mountain stream before turning off onto one of the many mine roads that littered the terrain. One such road ran by an old graveyard long since forgotten by the rest of the world. Some headstones there dated back to the onset of the 19th century.

I recall one night my father decided to go spotting. For those of you unfamiliar, spotting is a common practice amongst Appalachian hunters (perhaps amongst hunters in general, but I do not hunt so I am not sure). The hunter will set out before sunrise, taking a light and little else. The hunter will then proceed to shine the light, much like a spotlight, in hopes of catching a glimpse of an animal's eyes. You see, the eyes of an animal are luminous; and in complete darkness when the light passes over them they will shine. This is a method of establishing good hunting venues. On this

particular night, my father broke tradition and decided to take his shotgun with him on his spotting expedition. This decision, I would later learn, saved his life.

It was a warm spring night. I was always a night owl, so when my father stirred, I was still awake and playing my Super Nintendo. It was not a school night, so I was greeted with his ever-present smile. "Hey big man," he chimed. "You're up late."

"I want to beat Mario," I told him, my eyes leaving the screen long enough to see him tying his boots. He didn't reply, he just smiled and rubbed my head as he passed me on his way to the gun cabinet. From it, he removed his customary 12-gauge shotgun, some rounds, and a miner's light. The light, I recall, strapped to his forehead and attached to a rather large battery that he hung at his waist. He then made his way to the couch and sat next to me. He casually lifted the TV remote and

waited. When I finished the level he smiled.

"Pause it. I need to check the forecast," he told me. I obliged and he changed the channel. He watched as the forecaster rambled on about the weather and seemed content. "Not giving rain for today. That's good." He turned to me and smiled again. "Okay. You can go back to your game. I'm going out. I'll be back in a while, tell your mother I'll bring home supper. Tonight, we're going to have rabbit." He kissed my forehead and stood. I smiled at him as he rounded the hallway corner to our front door. I listened to the door shut and to the clunk of his boots as he made his way off the porch, down the steps and through the yard. His steps faded in the distance. From this point on, I cannot vouch for the validity of my tale, but I can tell you that the man who returned was not the man that left. Make no mistake, my father did return; but he was a changed man. He never spoke much of

that night until after I had started college. This is his story.

Like most other nights, he headed up the mountain via a trail that ran alongside the brook. The air was still and warm and the moon and stars shone bright. There were no clouds, and the forecast was clear. The sound of cicadas and crickets filled the air. He made his way along the trail intermittently shining his light on either side of the stream. He walked along the stream until he reached a fork in the path. To his left was his customary turn off, further up that trail was an old slate dump. Above it was a derelict coal shoot. He shined his light along that trail and contemplated. He had been talking with his hunting buddies and they had mentioned a sweet spot near the graveyard. A warren of rabbits had apparently taken residence near the abandoned cemetery, and they had all had good fortune when hunting there. My father thought on it for a moment before turning to the

right. The trail on the right lead up the mountain to the mine. This is where we drew our water. It passed by the cemetery where the rabbits were said to reside. He continued to follow the stream until making his way to the cemetery.

Upon his arrival, he skimmed his light back and forth across the plots. If there was a warren here, the rabbits were definitely not being very active tonight. He trudged amongst the plots until finally deciding to move on. He walked back to the trail and stopped. He could go back along the stream trail and to the slate dump – at the very least, he thought, he could cover grounds he was used to hunting. Instead, he decided to follow the trail further. He had been walking for a little more than fifteen minutes when he noticed a strange phenomenon. The light from the moon and stars was completely gone. Clouds covered the sky and in the distance somewhere there was flash of lightning. He counted the

seconds to the thunder. The sky roared a moment then fell silent. There was no rain. He silently observed his surroundings, shining his light on either side of the trail. He paused for a moment longer, and then trudged on. As he walked he noticed something else. Very faint, and very rhythmically his footsteps were echoing. This was unusual. If you've ever been in a wooded mountain, one thing you'll notice is that the mountains are excellent listeners and seldom repeat what they're told. It was then the silence consumed him. The cicadas, the crickets, and the owls — they were all hushed. My father stopped and shined his light around him. He saw nothing and after a moment he continued along the trail.

The echo was silent for a moment then started up again. With every crunch of my father's feet, he could hear a crunch simultaneously hit the trail behind him. Someone, or something, was following him. Deliberately and furtively stalking

him. He stopped again, and so did his echo. He shined the light around him again, in all directions: down the trail, into the trees, and even into the air.

Nothing.

There was absolutely nothing there. He carefully observed his surroundings. It was then he noticed another trail, not three feet from him on the other side of the brush. Silently, he began devising a plan. He decided that he would begin walking again, and when the echo recommenced he'd take another step...but he'd stop. If it were his mind playing tricks then the echo would stop too. He turned up the trail and continued along his way. Within moments the echo re-emerged. He waited until he was confident it the time was right, and he stepped...and stopped mid step. His foot was barely an inch from the ground.

CRUNCH

The sound resonated through his being and sent shivers down his spine. He spun around and shined the light again only to be greeted by darkness. He turned back up the trail and quickened his pace. This time the strides did not mimic his own. They were faster and louder. It dawned on my father at this point that he had pissed it off, whatever it was. He loaded his shotgun as another plan developed in his mind. He decided to step through the brush to the trail on the other side. There he would wait for it to pass him, and he would turn the tides. Without hesitation he cut off his light and stepped across the brush and waited in darkness. The sound of its strides continued up the trail before stopping what sounded like mere feet away. Then it crossed through the brush, coming to a halt beside him. His stomach sank and he fumbled for his light. He could feel eyes burning into his skin, boring holes into his brain. The light came on with a sudden

flash...nothing. There was absolutely nothing there. He shined the light all around him. There was no sign of anything passing through the brush, no sign of anything walking along the trail. My father, an expert hunter, could find no trace of the thing that was stalking him. He shined his light further up the trail and saw something. A building...the old coal shoot that was just above the slate dump. He bolted for it. He could hear its strides coming up fast behind him. He turned into the coal shoot and dove in. The shoot collapsed around him, sending him pouring down onto slate and rock. He quickly made his way to his feet and shined his light towards the shoot, shotgun in firing position. He could hear it moving fast up the trail. He heard it hit the coal shoot. The shoot thundered and trembled under its weight, but my father couldn't see anything. He blindly fired, pumped, and fired again and again. The boom of his shotgun echoed throughout the valley...the sound matched by a

roar that made the hair on his neck stand. The shoot was silent for a moment. Then he heard its strides bolt in the opposite direction. It made its way up the mountain towards the mine. He listened for a long time. Silence.

He got home around noon. He was beaten up pretty badly from his fall. He never said a word. My mother attempted to console him, and he silently looked at her. His eyes filled with dread and his ever-present smile gone. Not long after that he and my mom separated. The court ordered that the house be turned over to me upon my 21st birthday. I returned home to find him sitting on the porch, shotgun beside him. He had long since erected a security fence around the property. He told me his tale and he told me that he continued to hear it. When he walked to his mother's or when he trimmed the hedges and mowed the lawn. He could hear it following him. Ever presently, it stalked him. Hunted him.

After my father passed, I left the house empty. It didn't feel right taking it when he had built it from the ground up. But then I met the woman who would become my wife. We married after I graduated college, and now she's pregnant with my son. I brought my family back here, to raise them where I was raised.

But I write this now because I am afraid. Each night I do a quick sweep of the property. I check the house and then I check the yard...and each night I can hear my footsteps echoing beyond the fence.

Mason

It was a dark and rainy day in February when I was hit by a small red pick up. February 15th. I was told I flew 15 feet before landing smack on my head. Apparently the driver was drunk and didn't see me crossing.

I don't remember that day at all.

Four weeks I slept, in a coma that many feared I would never come out of. I was placed in a ward of children and teens with major bodily harm or disease. My roommate was a boy named Mason. I never did find out his last name. For the time in which I slept, he found out bits and pieces of me from my various visitors. My favorite color, what music I liked, and other random things.

The day I woke up, I was showered with love and attention from my family and it took me almost an hour to realize the presence of the boy lying in the bed beside me. He flashed me a lopsided grin and quietly went back to the book he was reading.

Eventually I was left in peace and after about 20 minutes of mental debate, I spoke up and asked him his name. His voice was smooth and low and never failed to make me shudder. We spent the rest of the evening playing 20 questions and becoming familiar with each other.

Eventually, my doctor would break our quality time and give me the low down on my injuries and what the healing process would be like. He told me that when I was hit, not only did I give myself a nasty concussion, but my legs were also broken in my oh-so-gracefully landing.

They said I had a 60% chance of ever walking again.

We became close instantaneously. The nurses would laugh and say we already looked like an old married couple bundled up in bed watching whatever soap opera happened to be on television. Mason would just flash me his trademark grin while I blushed and buried my face in his chest.

We both had our good days and bad ones, Mason and I. On a particularly tough day of treatment for him, we both lay together with him trembling in my arms. I'll never forget the feeling of his soft hiccups or the knot at the pit of my stomach. I finally got up my

courage and asked him the million-dollar question.

He had Hodgkin's disease. I don't think either of us slept that night.

While my legs were transitioned from casts to braces, Mason's chemotherapy began. However, without fail, when I'd come back frustrated or in tears over a difficult session of therapy, he'd be there to comfort me with soothing words and reruns of I Love Lucy.

Over the weeks, the chemo began to take its toll. His brown curls thinned to almost nothing, dark circles took permanent residence under his eyes, and his skin turned as pale as snow. As my legs grew stronger, the day I was released no longer seemed like something to look forward to.

The day we decided to shave his hair was the day I broke down. I told him I would do anything; give blood, bone marrow, anything to

make him get better faster, but he just shot me his smile that instantly made me melt and wiped my tears away.

60%. Mason had a sixty percent chance of beating his demons, the same as me.

On May 12, I was officially released from room 104. I would walk with a limp most likely for the rest of my life. Every other day I would visit Mason. Each time I would leave we would take a picture together. Over the months I could compare our first picture and our most recent one and see how much he was deteriorating. It was heartbreaking.

August 17 was the first time I lost him. Overnight a high fever had broken out and his heart stopped for 4 1/2 minutes. Those were the worst minutes of my life. I sat outside his room in an uncomfortable plastic chair watching the nurses I knew all too well scrambling back and forth

attempting to save his fragile
life.

I didn't leave his side until he
squeezed my hand, winked, and told
me to go home and take a shower.

After that, I vowed I would
never let him leave me alone again.

I guess the odds weren't in
Mason's favor for by the time
Thanksgiving came around, he was
almost a skeleton. But I didn't
care.

He confided in me that night,
accepting the fact that his time
was almost up and promising to wait
for me on the other side. I begged
him not to go, but he just lightly
shook his head and rubbed soft
circles into my back. He wasn't
going to survive to see Christmas.

That was two months ago.

No longer being able to bear to
see him hooked up to all sorts of
machines, we decided to steal away
in the night together. I bundled
him up and we drove away in my

mother's car until we arrived at an
old cabin my family would stay in
during the holidays. Mason and I
couldn't be any happier. I don't
care that I'm on the news every
night, or that every cop in the
county is looking for me.

All I care about is being with
Mason forever.

Even if his flesh is crawling
with maggots and beginning to peel
off his bones, Even if the smell
off his rotting cadaver never fades
from my skin. His lips are still
warm at night and he often whispers
sweet secrets into my ear before we
sleep. No one, not the police,
doctors, or anyone else can ever
separate us. I'm ready for them
when they come.

I made sure to bring the
sharpest scalpel I could find when
we left the hospital.

But until then, I'll lay in
Mason's arms, or at least what I
think were once his strong

appendages, and we'll talk all night until he takes me away.

We'll be together forever.

The Quantum Man

Jonathan Felix sat back in the chair after affixing the final electrodes to his skull. He is currently reclined in one of the most expensive private scientific investments in the world, and today was the fruition of his, and many others, efforts. The aim of the project was to open a human beings mind and allow them to perceive one of the spatial dimensions above the mediocre three.

The actual result was still a point of contestation, but it was suspected that the individual would be able to study all possible universes that could be created from his actions, and then choose the one that he wished to follow. A man whose every action would be perfect as he had already witnessed the results.

Felix had jumped at the opportunity, because he was young and headstrong. In his early twenties and brilliant in the field of quantum mechanics, he was relishing the opportunity to apply the usually theoretical aspects of his craft to a physical medium. He gave the final thumbs up to the techs behind the safety glass, and they activated the first stages of the machine. A microphone in the room relayed his words as the process started.

"If I have seen farther than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." Imitation was the greatest form of flattery, he thought with a grin.

The chair reclined back until it became a flat table, and a large rotating dome lowered down to encompass his entire body. Within the dome, there was a complex crystalline structure lining the inside. He focused on the facets of the crystals, and noticed that they had started to morph, shifting in

ways his mind just could not understand. He started to feel light-headed and dizzy.

His sight was suddenly filled with explosions of light, and his body started to spasm. Reading his health signs in the control room, the engineers instantly halted the operation. A medic ran in checked the vitals of Felix, and was pleased to find a weak, yet consistent heartbeat.

Felix opened his eyes a couple of minutes later. He looked up at the doctor and suddenly jerked up as he realized where he was.

"What happened? I don't feel any different..."

The doctor smiled and patted him on the shoulder

"Any landing you can walk away from, right?"

The doctor turned to walk away, caught his ankle on a trailing cable, tripped forwards, and cracked his forehead against the

corner of the table. His head twisted to a sickening angle...

Reset

The doctor turned to walk away, caught his ankle on a trailing cable, tripped forwards, and then was grabbed from behind as Felix threw himself from the chair, stopping him inches from the table corner.

Felix collapsed and threw up. His hands shaking, he realized that he had just perceived two universes and had actively chosen the one he wanted. He smiled at the doctor.

"I did it! I can see them ...I can see them all..."

Felix's smile faded.

He now saw two new universes, both the same as far as he was aware. Suddenly, a third, a fourth, a fifth blossomed in his mind. He could suddenly see all of the possibilities that he was capable of, some he didn't wish to see. His mind began to fracture.

Felix grabbed the medic and in an act of unnatural rage plunged his thumbs into the poor attendant's eyes...

Reset

Felix looked despairingly into the eyes of the medic and started to scream, refusing to stop even when bubbles of blood foamed around the corners of his mouth...

Reset

Felix grabbed the table leg and forcefully head-butted the corner, only achieving his goal of shattering his skull on the fourth strike...

Reset

Felix sat on the floor experiencing all the potential evil that he was physically capable of. His body shook as he moaned sobs of horror. He grabbed the collar of the medic and drew them face-to-face.

"TOO FAR...TOO FAR..." he screamed

His eyes blurred for a second, then started to turn yellow and shriveled. At the same moment his hair changed to the purest white. Felix in his final moments became aware of a magnitude of universes bearing down on him, and he would have to live through every single one. His grip slipped and his mind was lost to the abyss.

Reset

Cabin Fever

Part I: The Situation

Stranded in the middle of that colorless gray period that one gets in the deepest throes of winter, cabin fever was starting to set in. The only signs of life on the outside were the headlights of the drivers brave enough to take on the dangerous, otherwise dead, roads. Nature's makeshift bridges, made up mostly of broken tree limbs, fallen trees,

and downed power lines were everywhere and posed a great threat to those stupid drivers who wanted to go Dog-knows where. Even more dangerous was all the black ice. By day it was present yet avoidable. By night it was deadly and it blended in perfectly with its environment; Black on black on black. It was like some cold, heartless chameleon out to and hell-bent on showing people their maker, or lack thereof.

Life on the inside wasn't much better. Here the only signs of life were the dancing candle flames and out own slowly beating hearts. It was as if we were all living in the colonial era, surviving by the light that emanated from the candle that cast an eerie glow. There was nothing but such to keep us company. We were all in the darkest shadows cast by a town-

wide blackout and it had been like that for days. Perhaps as many as two weeks had gone by since the last pulse of electricity had faded.

For me, Spencer Princeton, the small town of North Brookfield seemed unreachable from the threshold of my front door. The ethereal blackness that covered the whole town was so alien. There was a mysterious, omnipresent hostility to it. I said goodbye to my family who, understandably so, had left me in charge of looking over the house while they looked for a shelter that wasn't filled to capacity. As soon as they faded into the night I knew I was alone.

Cut off from the rest of the world there was nothing to do but write and read. In the deepest pits of the realm of horror I could only lay still

and have fantasies of my darkest dreams, bursting through some psychic wall into reality. There were whispers within the crackles of fire: Demons within the shadows. Dancing. Enticing me.

Part II: Paranoia

That night I had the most horrible nightmare as sleep dominated over my physical and mental will. In my dream I saw nothing other than the decay and rot brought on by some worldwide disaster: Some unknown, apocalyptic cataclysm. From within the deepest dungeons inside my mind, I envisioned myself walking the dark streets of my town, which sat dormant and days dead, past all the blackened houses, all the store fronts that were left only to the stray cats to rule, and past the rotting corpses that littered the street. In my most

natural calm I sidestepped and stepped over the bodies of people I once knew. In this alien world it was only I and the dead to keep me morbid company. In a blinding flash of light and a deafening burst of sound the dream world is brought back to light. Brought back to life. I watched in awe as the dead stood up in a flurry of stiff, cracking, primitive movement like a butterfly flapping its wings in front of a stop-motion camera. Completely unaware of me they all began to partake in an orgy of life of sorts. They lived through death in the most macabre way. The walking dead mobbed the streets and marched, en masse, into oblivion and into the darkness beyond.

I wake up and feel even deader than the walking corpses. Plunged into darkness deeper

than my dream, a sudden,
inexplicable fear washed over
me. Paralyzed with fear I sat,
unwillingly, and let my eyes
adjust to the darkness. I looked
over and felt so stupid as the
realization hits me that the
candles went out while I was
asleep. I got up to find the
matches and a new terror crawled
up the nape of my neck.

Not able to shake the feeling
of being watched I made haste to
get into the kitchen. Checking
over my shoulders as I went, I
expected to be confronted by
some unspeakable terror stalking
me from behind. The shadows
played with my psyche and
horrifying demons formed out of
the anonymous shadows that
mercilessly enveloped the house.
The shadows reached out to me.
They spoke to me. They beckoned
to me.

I found the matches that
would deliver me from the
darkness and keep me safe. Keep
me alive. As I walked alone in
my house I saw from the corners
of my eyes the shadows
retreating to the corners and
creases created by the walls.
Always surrounded, my heart rate
accelerated as I turned to keep
the demons at bay, in turn
making myself vulnerable. With
my flame dancing wildly I could
think of nothing other than how,
with every more I made, I'd run
the risk of the flame blowing
out. Then I'd be really fucked.

Laying on the couch in a
fetal position and sometimes
twitching as the whispers grew
louder and louder, I gave up on
resisting the beckoning calls of
the living blackness within the
shadows. Still continuing to
increase in volume the voices

rose to a grand crescendo,
nearly screaming into my ears.
My head was in a vise of noise
and the clamp was pressing
against my temple, ready to
crush my skull at the slightest
change in decibel level. Then,
as suddenly as the noise started
it stopped.

Part III: The Call

Intrigued and relieved at the
sudden peace that befell the
house, I propped my head up with
a couple of pillows. With my
head up and my ears perked an
incessant ringing in my ears
developed. The noise came at
one-second intervals. Once
Mississippi ring two Mississippi
ring three Mississippi ring.
Jesus Christ it was the phone.
The power grid must have gone
back online while I was in the
grip of... some mental
breakdown. Slowly making my way
up the stairs the phone's ring

grew louder ever so gradually.
Walking down the hall the hairs
on the back of my neck stood on
end as if acting as the sentries
against some unknown adversary.
I passed by rooms filled only by
dusty furniture, the darkness,
and the unspeakable evils that
had been plaguing me. The demons
were in my house and there was
no denying it. The thought of
sharing my home with these
beasts, only to be tormented day
after day, deeply disturbed me.
Despite my state of sheer terror
I casually walked down the
hallway at a slow pace so as to
keep my calm and not attract
attention to myself. In front of
the home library I stood at the
threshold debating whether or
not to answer the phone. Taking
the step in I could almost feel
the shadows caressing me. A
sense of weightlessness came
over me as if I was suspended in
some ethereal dream... again. I

walked toward the desk on which the phone sat and, with my hand mere inches over the receiver I stood still as if waiting for something to happen. I picked up the receiver.

"Hello?" I asked.

Nothing. The only sound that came out was the subliminal humming of dead air.

"Hello?!" I demanded as I became more and more irate.

Nothing. Then... in an explosion of sound that almost made me drop the phone, the sound of static and unintelligible rambling deafened and dazed me temporarily. The static died down to a low rumble almost instantly but the phantom caller speaking in strange tongues still "spoke" as loud as "he" did just seconds ago. From

under the noises I could hear "You and me" being repeated over and over again, "You and me"... just "You and me".

The ultimate realization hit me like a cement truck. The power wasn't back on. When I walked down the hall and through the house not a single light flashed. Random times did not blink on and off the faces of the electronic clocks. I wanted to throw up. It felt like a brick wall had just jumped me. The phone rang again. I feared picking it up. I did so nonetheless. Nothing. Static. Tongues.

"You and me".

I didn't bother putting the receiver back on the hook. I turned to walk out of the room and admit defeat. No dice. The door to the library slammed shut

in my face. With a surreal calm, depressed, stoicism I tried the door know. To my surprise it opened without any problems. I did not want to exit the room though. I waited for someone to come up the stairs and face me. I waited to see someone at the end of the hall suddenly materialize. I waited to feel the icy hand of death come up from behind and wrap themselves around my throat. No such thing happened.

Part IV: Visions

In front of me the hall stretched in length as if I'd been walking for miles on end and suddenly stopped. It stretched and at the end a black void materialized from the collective shadows congealing into one mass like a blood clot obstructing an artery. In an

instant everything snapped back to where it had once been. Then the doors, that were just seconds before ajar, started violently slamming open and closed by themselves. It was as loud and violent as any twenty-one-gun-salute. From the darkness of the threshold of the doors I could see faces, blacker still, peeking out whenever the doors opened. Open, face, slam shut, and repeat. The whole ordeal was like some fucked up, sadistic, psychotic, demonic whack-a-mole game that lasted for what seemed like hours. After an unbearably long diminuendo the entire situation halted, as if someone stopped time itself in its tracks.

My heart was pounding in my and my blood was pumping as fast as possible. I jumped up to the door and quickly closed it behind me. I was not going out

into that hallway even if my life depended on it. The adrenaline was coursing my veins and I hardly let out a pep as a figure suddenly materialized outside of the second story window. Staring through me with eyes that were almost invisible to my naked eye, I watched as the being, darker than the night itself, back up and repeatedly rammed into the windowpane trying to break through. I guess I would leave the library after all.

Running through the hallway, constantly looking over my shoulder to see if anything was giving me chase, I quickly turned a sharp right and descended down the stairs carefully placing my steps as to not fall down. It wasn't so hard. Anyone so uncoordinated as to fall down a flight of stairs surely deserves to die. At the

bottom of the staircase I was face to face with another horrifying entity. Its face and palms were pressed up against the glass which made it look like a bloated, boorish, beast. Anything other than its face and hands were invisible when put against the night outside. Its eyes were as black and soulless as its skin was pale. A disturbingly wide grin revealed teeth that were a disgustingly rotted mix of greens, yellows, and blacks. Its short, quick and shallow breath instantly appeared on the cold glass and almost as rapidly disappeared.

I speedily turned on my right heel and sprinted down the first floor hallway past windows which were occupied by similarly terrifying monsters. I stop as I almost run into a wall. Feeling all of their eyes on me I slowly turn to face the beasts. Every

single one of them looks at me with a primal, greedy, ravenous hunger that chilled me down to the marrow. Everywhere I moved their eyes and their eyes only would follow. I screamed and they found sadistic delight in my suffering. Their breath fogged up the glass as the demons breathed more and more rapidly. Their fists and palms hammered against the glass as they drool and rave and chant as they awaited their prey's surrender.

Part V: The Nightmare Ends

Drowning in noise and shear terror I closed my eyes and block my ears and scream. Above my shrill cries I hear a humming. A brilliant radiance burns through my tightly closed eyelids. I opened my eyes to see nothing but pure whiteness and, as my sight adjusted, nothing beyond the windows. The power is

back on. The lights are all on and for the first time in days the clocks tell the time. I sighed a long breath of relief. I relished in the light. Then with the return of electric life the return of my family followed in close suit.

Not telling anyone of my ordeal I walked into the living room and shut off the lights happily anticipating the comfortable flow of the television. As the light goes out my jaw dropped as all the demonic horrors congregated around the living room windows. I was pale and frozen by fear. My parents looked at me and then outside the window and asked...

"What do you see? There's nothing out there."

White With Red

A man went to a hotel and walked up to the front desk to check in. The woman at the desk gave him his key and told him that on the way to his room, there was a door with no number that was locked and no one was allowed in there. She explained that it was a storeroom, and that it was out of bounds. She reminded him of this several times before allowing him upstairs. So he followed the instructions of the woman at the front desk, going straight to his room, and going to bed. However the insistence of the woman had piqued his curiosity, so the next night he walked down the hall to the door and tried the handle. Sure enough it was locked. He bent down and looked through the wide keyhole. Cold air passed through it, chilling his eye.

What he saw was a hotel bedroom, like his, and in the corner was a woman whose skin was incredibly pale. She was leaning her head against the wall, facing away from the door. He stared in confusion for a while, was this a celebrity? The owner's daughter? He almost knocked on the door, out of curiosity, but decided not to. As he was still looking, the woman turned sharply and he jumped back from the door, hoping she would not suspect he had been spying on her. He crept away from the door and walked back to his room. The next day, he returned to the door and looked through the wide keyhole. This time, all he saw was redness. He couldn't make anything out besides a distinct red color, unmoving. Perhaps the inhabitants of the room knew he was spying the night before, and had blocked the keyhole with

something red. He felt embarrassed that he had made the woman so uncomfortable, and hoped she had not made a complaint with the woman on the front desk.

At this point he decided to consult her for more information. After some gentle quizzing and the promise that the explanation would go no further than him she finally said "Well, I might as well tell you the story of what happened in that room. A long time ago, a man murdered his wife in there, we find that even now, whomever stays there gets very uncomfortable. But these people were not ordinary. They were white all over, except for their eyes, which were red."

Fire

I am followed by fire.

It sounds really, really weird, I know, but it's true. Every house, every apartment I've ever lived in has burned to the ground. Even stranger—it's predictable. If I lived somewhere for six years, six years after I move out it goes up in flames. It's not exact, but it's close, usually accurate to within two or three months.

It's true. I'm not sure when I noticed the pattern for the first time, but it's always been there. When I was just a kid, right after I was born, my family lived in an old house behind my grandmother's house. We were there until I was two, when we moved. I remember visiting my grandmother's at four, watching the smoldering

embers of the little house and the curling smoke rising into the air. Old wiring from the 50's finally gave out.

From the shack, we moved to a farm. We weren't well off enough to own it or anything, but we did run it for the local doctor. The farmhouse wasn't that big, and most of my childhood memories come from the cozy, family setting it engendered. Here, I remember Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays. I think of it whenever I think of "back home." We lived there from when I was two until I was nine, when the doctor we worked for died. At fifteen, it burned, an old tree struck by lightning sparking off the blaze.

The third house I lived in was the second to burn to the ground. We only lived there for

around two years, so it happened when I was thirteen. It was an old house, a very old house. What I remember most was its shape. We called them "shotgun" houses, because you could fire a shotgun from one end and it would pass all the way through to the other. One room after another, all in a straight line, built as needed. It was, honestly, very old and dry. I'm not surprised that the heating stove in the front room sprung a leak on the tenants after us.

Other than where I'm at now, the only place left is my parent's current house. When they asked me why I was moving all my stuff stored in the basement out, I didn't have the heart to tell them, so I made up some excuse about having my old books and stuff closer to college. I didn't know what else to say.

When I turned nineteen, I moved out of my parent's house, and went to college. Before renting the house I live in now, I stayed in an apartment in the city. I shared it with a couple of assholes that seemed nice enough before I moved in. Everyone knows the type. Won't pay their bills on time. Eats whatever they can lay hands on. It got worse and worse until I made up my mind. When I'd finally had enough, I left. We were four months into a one-year lease. Now I'm just keeping an eye on the news. Waiting for the sparks. A gas leak, a stray match... Sooner or later, they'll burn.

They always burn.

I Don't See Him Anymore

I used to see him often. Well, I guess I shouldn't say him, more like... it. Then I moved away, to another state, another city. I don't see it anymore. Not physically, though it creeps through my mind in its swooping, slinking way. It goes high up in the air one moment, then sliding across the ground the next, over and over and over, its limbs propelling itself forward.

The mere thought sends ice-cold shivers running down my spine. It used to watch me, but it can't anymore. At least, I don't think it can. I wouldn't be surprised, however, to wake in the early hours of the day when the sky is still dark, and look to my window to see those eyes, those teeth, see it smile that awful smile. I hope I'm dead before that day arises. I

hope I've seen the last of that monster.

When I was little, I lived in a small suburban neighborhood. It isn't the kind you're probably thinking of—big, white, uniform houses all lined up in perfect rows with green lawns and two garage doors. No, my neighborhood was much older. It was built sometime in the fifties and every house looked different, but most had started to fall apart. The people living there were hardworking and honest for the most part, and their long, hard lives showed on their faces. No one really talked to anyone else. That was one of the only things I didn't like about that neighborhood. My mother always said the neighbors just liked to keep to themselves, that they had nothing very important to say, anyway. Looking back on it now,

I think they did have something important to say: Something very, very important.

I saw it for the first time when I was eight years old, during the summer. It was very hot that season, unusually so compared to all the summers I've had since then, so I'd stayed inside most the morning. Then, after lunch, my father hooked up the sprinkler we used for our garden in our backyard. I excitedly got into play clothes and rushed outside, into the blinding sun. Those were the days, those innocent days in the sun where I played without a care. I had no idea I would soon be missing them. So, I was outside, running and laughing and jumping through the cool spray of water... when I saw it. At first I didn't notice it—it was just a rustle in the bushes. Then it was the crack of a

branch and I looked up.
Something...something dark moved
through those leaves. Something
as black as midnight, yet it
shimmered when the sun hit it.
It ran--or galloped, to this day
I'm still not sure what to call
it--from a small forest behind my
house, leapt over my neighbor's
fence, and disappeared from my
view. I was curious, so I chased
it.

The pavement burned my feet,
but I didn't care. I watched,
along with a few other
neighborhood children, as the
creature swept in and out of the
shadows of trees, making its way
down the street. It was large,
probably about eight feet tall
if it stood upright, though it
never did. Instead, it stayed
hunched over, its hind legs
curled up at its sides, the
knees protruding grotesquely
past its torso. Large, white,

curled claws grew from bony feet
and long, slender fingers. Its
arms were gnarled, the joints
bulging under twisted muscle and
skin. Skin that was black and
rubbery stretched thin over
whatever bones the beast had. It
caved in at odd places and
almost looked as if... it were
rotting. Still, when it crept
through the sun, patches
glistened gray and blue, as if
it were made of some kind of
foreign glass.

Then there was its face. The
skin was the same, stretched
over an oblong oval skull that
juttied out in the back. Its eyes
were sunken deep within its
head, large and round and
hollow. They glowed a weird
white-yellow; one I'm sure
doesn't have a name to this day.
Really, it wasn't even glowing.
It was more of a pulsating,
ever-present light that seemed

to come straight from some nonexistent soul deep within the monster's core. It always seemed to smile. Its mouth was stretched, like its skin, far across its face. You know the expression, "grinning ear to ear"? It was literal in this case, each corner reaching each side of its face, where ears would have been if it had any. Within this smile were two rows of pure white teeth, long and sharp. In fact, each tooth was so long, it could never close its mouth. The sharp tips just clacked against each other as it skulked around, waving its head slowly from side to side, as if sniffing something in the air. I use to find this silly, since it had no nose. Now the thought terrifies me.

We kids just watched it in a sort of dazed amazement, never having seen something like it

before. I suppose I thought it was just some species I had yet to learn about in school—I wish that's all it had been. Then our parents called us back inside for dinner and we grudgingly obeyed, not wanting to get in trouble. I'm not sure about the other kids, but I never quite forgot about the creature I'd seen. I got preoccupied with other things, sure, but its image was always in the back of my mind. It was burning there, waiting for me to remember it late at night while I tried to drift off to sleep. It got its wish.

That night I was lying in bed with my covers pulled up to my chin, despite how hot I was. The nightlight across the room barely gave me comfort from the thoughts of ghouls and ghosts hiding in my closet or under my bed. Then the beast's image

slipped into my thoughts. I gripped the covers. It hadn't scared me before, yet I'd been mere feet away from it. But now, after having the image sit in my mind all day, my brain registering its unworldly appearance, I started to fear it. It was bad, and I knew that now.

Then I heard a tap. I froze. Another tap. I didn't dare move. Then there was another and another and another. It was at my window. I could hear its long claws scrape across the glass, hear its razor-sharp fangs as they clicked together...I could hear its breathing. Heavy, husky, in and out, in and out it went. Finally, I could no longer bear it. I tore my eyes from my night-light and gazed through the dark room towards my window. It smiled when it saw me. An impossibly huge grin that split

its face in two, white teeth glistening with saliva, gleaming eyes seeming to pull every fear from my conscious and unconscious to the surface. I screamed. By the time my parents rushed into my room, it was gone, no traces of its existence left behind. They said it was just a nightmare.

It wasn't just a nightmare.

I never saw it in the daytime again, but I saw it every night. After a week I stopped screaming, I just cried silently in my bed. Then, after another week, I stopped crying. It knew I was scared; I wasn't going to give it the satisfaction of seeing me tremble. It wasn't until it found the lock on my window that I was truly terrified. I'll never forget the clunk the lock made when it had been moved for the first time in years, or the waning screech of

the window as it slid open, or the heavy breathing at my bedside. I'll never forget those eyes as they gazed at me from beyond my covers. It knew I was scared. It thrived on that.

It wouldn't leave me alone. Everyone says I went crazy, but I didn't! It just wouldn't leave me alone! I hardly ever slept, my hair started to fall out and I always looked tired. My parents put me here, in this "psychiatric hospital". It's a nut house, that's what it is! I'm not crazy! It's been years-- years. The nightmares still happen when I do sleep, so they keep me here. I suppose I like it better this way, though. After all, the monster can't get me here. You know, the funny thing is... I can't even remember where I use to live. I can't remember the state or the city...

I can't even remember... the country.

The Smiling Man

About five years ago I lived downtown in a major city in the US. I've always been a night person, so I would often find myself bored after my roommate, who was decidedly not a night person, went to sleep. To pass the time, I used to go for long walks and spend the time thinking.

I spent four years like that, walking alone at night, and never once had a reason to feel afraid. I always used to joke with my roommate that even the drug dealers in the city were polite. But all of that changed in just a few minutes of one evening.

It was a Wednesday, somewhere between one and two in the morning, and I was walking near a police patrolled park quite a ways from my apartment. It was a quiet night, even for a weeknight, with very little traffic and almost no one on foot. The park, as it was most nights, was completely empty.

I turned down a short side street in order to loop back to my apartment when I first noticed him. At the far end of the street, on my side, was the silhouette of a man, dancing. It was a strange dance, similar to a waltz, but he finished each "box" with an odd forward stride. I guess you could say he was dance-walking, headed straight for me.

Deciding he was probably drunk, I stepped as close as I could to the road to give him the majority of the sidewalk to

pass me by. The closer he got, the more I realized how gracefully he was moving. He was very tall and lanky, and wearing an old suit. He danced closer still, until I could make out his face. His eyes were open wide and wild, head tilted back slightly, looking off at the sky. His mouth was formed in a painfully wide cartoon of a smile. Between the eyes and the smile, I decided to cross the street before he danced any closer.

I took my eyes off of him to cross the empty street. As I reached the other side, I glanced back... and then stopped dead in my tracks. He had stopped dancing and was standing with one foot in the street, perfectly parallel to me. He was facing me but still looking

skyward. Smile still wide on his lips.

I was completely and utterly unnerved by this. I started walking again, but kept my eyes on the man. He didn't move. Once I had put about half a block between us, I turned away from him for a moment to watch the sidewalk in front of me. The street and sidewalk ahead of me were completely empty. Still unnerved, I looked back to where he had been standing to find him gone. For the briefest of moments I felt relieved, until I noticed him. He had crossed the street, and was now slightly crouched down. I couldn't tell for sure due to the distance and the shadows, but I was certain he was facing me. I had looked away from him for no more than 10 seconds, so it was clear that he had moved fast.

I was so shocked that I stood there for some time, staring at him. And then he started moving toward me again. He took giant, exaggerated tip toed steps, as if he were a cartoon character sneaking up on someone, except he was moving very, very quickly.

I'd like to say at this point I ran away or pulled out my pepper spray or my cellphone or anything at all, but I didn't. I just stood there, completely frozen as the smiling man crept toward me.

And then he stopped again, about a car length away from me. Still smiling his smile, still looking to the sky.

When I finally found my voice, I blurted out the first thing that came to mind. What I meant to ask was, "What the fuck

do you want?!" in an angry, commanding tone. What came out was a whimper, "What the fuu...?"

Regardless of whether or not humans can smell fear, they can certainly hear it. I heard it in my own voice, and that only made me more afraid. But he didn't react to it at all. He just stood there, smiling.

And then, after what felt like forever, he turned around, very slowly, and started dance-walking away. Just like that. Not wanting to turn my back to him again, I just watched him go, until he was far enough away to almost be out of sight. And then I realized something. He wasn't moving away anymore, nor was he dancing. I watched in horror, as the distant shape of him grew larger and larger. He was coming back my way. And this time he was running.

I ran too.

I ran until I was off of the side road and back onto a better lit road with sparse traffic. Looking behind me then, he was nowhere to be found. The rest of the way home, I kept glancing over my shoulder, always expecting to see his stupid smile, but he was never there.

I lived in that city for six months after that night, and I never went out for another walk. There was something about his face that always haunted me. He didn't look drunk, and he didn't look high. He looked completely and utterly insane. And that's a very, very scary thing to see.

The Portraits

There was a hunter in the woods, who, after a long day hunting, was in the middle of an

immense forest. It was getting dark, and having lost his bearings, he decided to head in one direction until he was clear of the increasingly oppressive foliage. After what seemed like hours, he came across a cabin in a small clearing. Realizing how dark it had grown, he decided to see if he could stay there for the night. He approached, and found the door ajar. Nobody was inside. The hunter flopped down on the single bed, deciding to explain himself to the owner in the morning.

As he looked around the inside of the cabin, he was surprised to see the walls adorned by several portraits, all painted in incredible detail. Without exception, they appeared to be staring down at him, their features twisted into looks of hatred and malice. Staring back, he grew

increasingly uncomfortable. Making a concerted effort to ignore the many hateful faces, he turned to face the wall, and exhausted, he fell into a restless sleep.

The next morning, the hunter awoke -- he turned, blinking in unexpected sunlight. Looking up, he discovered that the cabin had no portraits, only windows.

The Lurkers

The sun was beginning to set as he was leaving the convenient store. "Crap!" he yelled to nobody. His voice echoed across the hills. He climbed into his Cadillac, and took off into the woodlands.

It was this time of day when those things got you. It was the time of day when the sun has lowered past the horizon and

turns the sky a blood red. The shadows of the trees stretched over the narrow road. He was in such a hurry now, that he didn't check between the trees for things that weren't shadows. He turned his headlights on. The shadows were closing in, and if he didn't get home before they did, he would be risking everything.

The porch lamps could be seen from his car now. He should have felt better, but the fear of what might happen lingered at the back of his head. The driveway was surrounded with shadow. This shadow, however, was unusually dark. It kept the lamps at bay. Then, at that very moment, he saw the thing.

It was dead, really dead. Despite that, it stared at him with spiteful eyes. Then, he felt a cold sweat come over him. The thing was four or five yards

from the cabin. It was crouched behind a bush, and kept its gaze on him. That was the moment when hope seemed like wishful thinking, and death seemed almost definite.

There was only one option, so he slowly reached behind the car seat and picked up his rifle. He opened up the barrel, and saw there was no ammunition. The worst was happening, and the odds weren't in his favor. He slowly opened the car door and stepped out.

He was surprised that the thing wasn't already approaching him. It was still crouched there, and remained the evil presence it was. He walked to the trunk, and cautiously pulled out his keys. The fear intensified, and he was beginning to shake. He turned the key and opened the trunk. The box of shells was at arms

length. He opened it, and loaded the gun.

Still shaking, he held up the rifle, and aimed the sights between the thing's eyes. He was beginning to pull the trigger. The voice in his head screamed "too easy." He was about to release the bullets, when the thing quickly stood up. It walked over the bush, and quickly approached him. The thing held out its arms and covered his eyes.

He woke the next morning. The sun shined through the windows of his home. He sat up in bed, and looked around. Blood was splattered all over the walls. He felt a chill. He got out of bed. There was a noise coming from a room down the hall.

He slowly walked down the corridor. The noise increased in volume, and he was really

getting nervous. He made it to the bathroom door: the source of the noise. He reached for the doorknob, and opened the door.

The same figure he saw before, was hunched over the bathtub. It was chewing on a bloodied carcass. He was too frightened to move. Despite the noise he made, the thing did not move. It was still hunched over. That moment later, it stood up, and climbed out the bathroom window. He looked at the thing's meal in disgust.

Before he could run, he noticed something. The arm of the body it was eating had a ring on it. He looked closer at it, and felt a rush of horror. The ring was his.

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